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BY

HUGH CONWAY.

F. John Fargus

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CHAPTER I.

IN DARKNESS AND IN DANGER.

I HAVE a reason for writing this tale, or it would not become public property.

Once, in a moment of confidence, I made a friend acquainted with some curious circumstances connected with one period of my life. I believe I asked him to hold his tongue about them—he says not. Any way, he told another friend, with embellishments I suspect; this friend told another, and so on and on. What the tale grew to at last I shall probably never learn; but since I was weak enough to trust my private affairs to another I have been looked upon by my neighbors as a man with a history—one who has a romance hidden away beneath an outwardly prosaic life.

For myself I should not trouble about this. I should laugh at the garbled versions of my story set floating about by my own indiscretion. It would matter little to me that one good friend has an idea that I was once a Communist and a member of the inner circle of a secret society—that another has heard that I have been tried on a capital charge—that another knows I was at one time a Roman Catholic, on whose behalf a special miracle was performed. If I were alone in the world and young, I dare say I should take no steps to still these idle rumors. Indeed, very young men feel flattered by being made objects of curiosity and speculation.

But I am not very young, nor am I alone. There is one who is dearer to me than life itself. One from whose heart, I am glad to say, every shadow left by the past is rapidly fading—one who only wishes to live her true sweet life without mystery or concealment—wishes to be thought neither better nor worse than she really is. It is she who shrinks from the strange and absurd reports which are flying about as to our antecedents—she who is vexed by those leading questions sometimes asked by inquisitive friends; and it is for her sake that I look up old journals, call back old memories of joy and grief, and tell every one, who cares to read, all he can possibly wish to know, and it may be, more than he has a right to know, of our lives. This done, my lips are sealed forever on the subject. My tale is here—let the inquisitive take his answer from it, not from me.

Perhaps, after all, I write this for my own sake as well. I also hate mysteries. One mystery which I have never been able to determine may have given me a dislike to every thing which will not admit of an easy explanation.

To begin, I must go back more years than I care to enumerate; although I could, if necessary, fix the day and the year. I was young, just past twenty-five. I was rich, having when I came of age succeeded to an income of about two thousand a year; an income which, being drawn from the funds, I was able to enjoy without responsibilities or anxiety as to its stability and endurance. Although since my twenty-first birthday I had been my own master, I had no extravagant follies to weigh me down, no debts to hamper me. I was without bodily ache or pain; yet I turned again and again on my pillow and said that my life for the future would be little more than a curse to me.

Had Death just robbed me of one who was dear to me? No; the only ones I had ever loved, my father and mother, had died years ago. Were my ravings those peculiar to an unhappy lover? No; my eyes had not yet looked with passion into a woman's eyes—and now would never do so. Neither Death nor Love made my lot seem the most miserable in the world.

I was young, rich, free as the wind to follow my own devices. I could leave England to-morrow and visit th most beautiful places on the earth: those places I had longed and determined to see. Now, I knew I should never see them, and I groaned in anguish at the thought.

My limbs were strong. I could bear fatigue and exposure. I could hold my own with the best walkers and the swiftest runners. The chase, the sport, the trial of endurance had never been too long or too arduous for me—I passed my left hand over my right arm and felt the muscles firm as of old. Yet I was as helpless as Samson in his captivity.

For, even as Samson, I was blind!

Blind! Who but the victim can even faintly comprehend the significance of that word? Who can *read* this and gauge the depth of my anguish as I turned and turned on my pillow and thought of the fifty years of darkness which might be mine—a thought which made me wish that when I fell asleep it might be to wake no more?

Blind! After hovering around me for years the demon of darkness had at last laid his hand upon me. After letting me, for a while, almost cheat myself into security, he had swept down upon me, folded me in his sable wings and blighted my life. Fair forms, sweet sights, bright colors, gay scenes mine no more! He claimed them all, leaving me darkness, darkness, ever darkness! Far better to die, and, it may be, wake in a new world of light—"Better," I cried in my despair, "better even the dull red glare of Hades than the darkness of the world!"

This last gloomy thought of mine shows the state of mind to which I was reduced.

The truth is that, in spite of hope held out to me, I had resolved to be hopeless. For years I had felt that my foe was lying in wait for me. Often when gazing on some beautiful object, some fair scene, the right to enjoy which made one fully appreciate the gift of sight, a whisper seemed to reach my ear—"Some day I will strike again, then it will be all over." I tried to laugh at my fears, but could never quite get rid of the presentiment of evil. My enemy had struck once—why not again?

Well I can remember his first appearance—his first attack. I remember a light-hearted school-boy so engrossed in sport and study that he scarcely noticed how strangely dim the sight of one eye was getting, or the curious change which was taking place in its appearance. I remember the boy's father taking him to London, to a large dull-looking house in a quiet dull street. I remember our waiting in a room in which were several other people; most of whom had shades or bandages over their eyes. Such a doleful gathering it was that I felt much relieved when we were conducted to another room in which sat a kind pleasant-spoken man, called by my father Mr. Jay. This eminent man, after applying something which I know now was belladonna to my eyes, and which had the effect for a short time of wonderfully improving my sight, peered into my eyes by the aid of strong lenses and mirrors—I remember at the time wishing some of those lenses were mine—what splendid burning glasses they would make! Then he placed me with my back to the window and held a lighted candle before my face. All these proceedings seemed so funny that I was half inclined to laugh. My father's grave anxious face alone restrained me from so doing. As soon as Mr. Jay had finished his researches he turned to my father—

"Hold the candle as I held it. Let it shine into the right eye first. Now, Mr. Vaughan, what do you see? How many candles, I mean?"

"Three—the one in the center small and bright, but upside down."

"Yes ; now try the other eye. How many there?'

My father looked long and carefully.

"I can only see one," he said, "the large one."

"This is called the catoptric test, an old-fashioned but infallible test, now almost superseded. The boy is suffering from lenticular cataract."

This terribly sounding name took away all my wish to laugh. I glanced at my father and was surprised to notice his face wearing an expression of relief.

"That may be cured by an operation," he said.

"Certainly ; but in my judgment it is not well to meddle, so long as the other eye remains unaffected."

"Is there danger?"

"There is always danger of the disease appearing in the sound eye: but, of course, it may not happen. Come to me at the first sign of such a thing. Good morning."

The great specialist bowed us out, and I returned to my school life, troubling little about the matter, as it caused me no pain, and, although in less than a twelvemonth the sight of one eye was completely obscured, I could see well enough for every purpose with the remaining one.

But I remembered every word of that diagnosis, although it was years before I recognized the importance of it. It was only when compelled by an accident to wear for some days a bandage over my sound eye that I realized the danger in which I stood, and from that moment felt that a merciless foe was ever waiting his time.

And now the time had come. In the first flush of my manhood, with all that one could wish for at my command, the foe had struck again.

He came upon me swiftly—far more swiftly than is his custom in such cases; yet it was long before I would believe the worst—long before I would confess to myself that my failing sight and the increasing fogginess of everything I looked at were due to more than a temporary weakness. I was hundreds of miles from home, in a country where travelling is slow. A friend being with me, I had no wish to make myself a nuisance by cutting our expedition short. So I said nothing for weeks, although at the end of each week my heart sank at the fresh and fearful advances made by the foe. At last, being unable to bear it, or in fact conceal it longer, I made known my condition to my comrade. We turned our faces homewards, and by the time London was reached and the long journey at an end, everything to me was blurred, dim and obscured. I could just see, that was all!

I flew to the eminent oculist's. He was out of town. Had been ill, even at the point of death. He would not be back for two months, nor would he see any patient until his health was quite restored.

I had pinned my faith upon this man. No doubt there were as skillful oculists in London, Paris, or other capitals ; but it was my fancy that, if I was to be saved, I could only be saved by Mr. Jay. Dying men are allowed their whims: even the felon about to be hanged can choose his own breakfast, so I had an undoubted right to choose my own surgeon. I resolved to wait in darkness until Mr. Jay returned to his duties.

I was foolish. I had better have trusted myself in other clever hands. Before a month was over I had lost all hope, and at the end of six weeks I was almost distracted. Blind, blind, blind! I should be blind forever! So entirely had I lost heart that I began to think I would not have the operation performed at all. Why fly against fate? For the rest of my life I was doomed to darkness. The subtlest skill, the most delicate hand, the most modern appliances would never restore the light I have lost. For me the world was at an end.

Now that you know the cause, can you not imagine me, after weeks of darkness, broken in spirit, and, as I lay sleepless that night, almost wishing that the alternative refused by Job—to curse God and die—were mine? If you are unable to realize my condition, read the above to any one who has lost his sight. He will tell you what his feelings were when the calamity first came upon him. He will understand the depths of my woe!

I was not left alone in my trouble. Like Job, I had comforters ; but, unlike Eliphaz and Company, they were good-hearted fellows who spoke with cheerful conviction as to the certainty of my recovery. I was not so grateful for these visits as I should have been. I hated the thought of any one seeing me in my helpless condition. Day by day my frame of mind grew more and more desponding and morbid.

My best friend of all was a humble one: Priscilla Drew, an old and trusted servant of my mother's. She had known me from earliest childhood. When I returned to England I could not bear the thought of trusting my helpless self entirely to a stranger's care, so I wrote to her and begged her to come to me. I could at least groan and lament before her without feeling shame. She came, wept over me for a while, and then, like a sensible woman, bestirred herself to do all she could to mitigate the hardships of my lot. She found omfortable lodgings, installed her troublesome charge therein, and day and night was ever at his beck and call. Even now, as I lay awake and tossing in mental anguish, she was sleeping on an extemporized bed just outside the folding doors, which opened from my bedroom to the sitting-room.

It was a stifling night in August. The sluggish air which crept in through the open window made little perceptible difference in the temperature of my room. Everything seemed still, hot and dark. The only sound I could hear was the regular breathing of the sleeper behind the door, which she had left an inch or two ajar in order that she might catch my faintest call. I had gone early to bed. What had I to wait up for now? It was sleep and sleep alone which brought forgetfulness, but to-night sleep refused to come to me. I struck my repeater. I had bought one in order that I might, at least, know the time. The little bell told me it was just past one o'clock. Craving for sleep I sighed and sank back upon my pillow.

Presently a fierce longing to be out of doors came over me. It was night—very few people would be bout. There was a broad pavement in front of the row of houses in one of which I lodged. Up and down this I might walk in perfect safety. Even if I only sat on he doorstep it would be better than lying in this close hot room, tossing from side to side, unable to sleep.

The desire took such full possession of me that I was on the point of calling old Priscilla and making her aware of it; but knowing she was sleeping soundly, I hesitated. I had been unusually restless, cross and exacting during the day, and my old nurse—heaven reward her!—was serving me for love, not for money. Why should I disturb her? Let me begin to learn to help myself like others in my wretched plight. I had already acquired this much, to dress without assistance. If I could now do this and leave the room unheard, I felt sure I could grope my way to the front door, let myself out, and, whenever I chose, return by the aid of the latch-key. The thought of even a temporary independence was attractive, and my spirits rose as I resolved to make the attempt.

I crept softly from my bed, and slowly, but easily dressed myself, hearing all the while the sleeper's regular breathing. Then, cautious as a thief, I stole to the door which led from my bed-room to the landing. I opened it without noise and stood on the thick carpet outside, smiling as I thought of the sleeper's dismay if she awoke and discovered my absence. I closed the door, then, guiding myself by the balustrade, passed lightly down the stairs and reached the street door without accident.

There were other lodgers in the house, among them young men who came in at all hours, so, the door being always left on the latch, I had no bolts to contend with. In a moment I was on the doorstep, with the door behind me closed.

I stood for a short time irresolute, almost trembling at my temerity. This was the first time I had ventured beyond the house without a guiding hand to trust to. Yet I knew there was nothing to fear. The street—a quiet one—was deserted. The pavement was broad, I could walk up and down without let or hindrance, guiding myself, after the manner of other blind persons, by tapping my stick against the curbstone or the railings. Still I must take a few precautions to enable me to ascertain my latitude and longitude at will.

I came down the four steps which led from the front door, turned myself to the right, and, by aid of the line of railings, set my face towards the end of the street. Then I began to walk and to count my steps, sixty-two of which brought my right foot on to a road, which told me I had reached my limit. I turned, counted back the sixty-two paces, and then sixty-five more in the same direction before I found myself again off the pavement My calculations were verified by my knowing that my house was very nearly in the centre of the row. I was now quite at my ease; I had determined the length of my tether; I could walk up and down the deserted street, yet, at any time I wished to do so, could, by counting from either end, arrest my steps in front of my abode.

So, mightily proud of my success, for a while I went up and down—up and down. I heard one or two cabs pass me, and also one or two persons afoot. As these latter seemed to pay no attention to me, I felt glad to think that my appearance and gait were not such as to attract notice. Most men like to conceal their infirmities.

This night excursion did me a great deal of good. Perhaps it was finding that I was not altogether so helpless and dependent that changed in a few minutes my whole frame of mind. The mental rebound took place. I went from despondency to hope—extravagant hope—even to certainty. Like a revelation it came to me that my malady was curable; that, in spite of my presentiment, what friends had been assuring me would prove to be the truth. So elated I grew that I threw my head back and walked with a firm quick step, almost forgetting that I was sightless. I began to think of many things, and my thoughts were happier ones than I had known for months. I gave up counting my paces, I walked on and on, planning what I should do; where I should go when my darkness was removed. I do not know whether I may have at times guided myself by the wall or pavement edge; but if so I did it mechanically and instinctively, without noticing the action or remembering it afterwards.

I cannot say whether it may be possible for a blind man, who can divest himself of the fear of encountering unseen obstacles, to walk as straightly and accurately as any one who can see. I only know that in my preoccupied and elevated state of mind, I must have done so. Intoxicated and carried away by the return of hope, I may have walked as a somnambulist or as one in a trance. Anyway, forgetful of all save my brighter thoughts, I went on and on, heedless of the missing sense, until coming full against a person walking in the opposite direction recalled me from my visions and brought me back to my misery. I felt the man I had encountered shake himself free; I heard him mutter "stupid fool!" and go swiftly on his way, leaving me motionless on the spot where the collision had occurred, wondering where I was and what I should do.

It was no use attempting to find my way back unaided. Not having brought my repeater with me I could not even say how long I had been walking. It might have been ten minutes, it might have been an hour since I gave up counting my steps. Judging by the number of things I had thought of since that rapturous exaltation of mind commenced it seemed more likely to be the latter. Now that I had come back to the earth I must be content to remain on this particular spot of it until I heard the step of a policeman or some one else who might happen to be abroad at this unusual hour—unusual, at least in this quiet part of London. I leaned my back against the wall and waited patiently.

I soon heard an approaching step; but such a staggering, uncertain, lurching kind of step, that from the sound of the feet alone I was able to determine the condition of their owner, and was obliged to decide that he was not the man I wanted. I must let him pass and wait for another. But the feet staggered up to me and stopped near me, whilst a voice, jolly, but like the feet unsteady, cried—

"'Nother feller worsh than me! Can't get on at all—eh, old chap? Comfort t' think some one's head 'll ache worse than mine to-morrow!"

"Can you tell me the way to Walpole street?" I asked, standing erect to show him I was sober.

"Walpole street—course I can—closhe by—third to left, I think."

"If you are going that way would you lead me to the corner of it. Unhappily I am blind and have lost my way."

"Blind, poor beggar—not screwed then. Guess I'm in nice state to lead any one. Blind leading blind—both tumble into ditch. I shay, though," he added, with drunken gravity, "make a bargain—I lend you eyes, you lend me legsh. Good idea. Come 'long."

He took my arm and we went yawing up the street. Presently he stopped.

"Walpole street," he hiccupped. "Shall I take you to your house?"

"No, thank you. Please put my hand on the railing of the corner house. I shall be all right then."

"Wish I were all right. Wish I could borrow your legs to take me home," said my bibulous conductor. "Good night—Blesh you."

I heard him tack away, then turned to complete my journey.

I was not quite certain as to which end of Walpole street I was starting from; that mattered little. Either sixty-two or sixty-five paces would leave me in front of my door. I counted sixty-two, and then felt for the entrance between the railings: not finding it, I went on a step or two until I came to it. I was glad to have reached home without accident, and, to tell the truth, was beginning to feel a little ashamed of my escapade. I hoped that Priscilla had not discovered my absence and alarmed the house, and I trusted I should be able to regain my room as quietly as I had quitted it. With all my elaborate calculations, I was not quite sure that I had hit upon the right house; but if they were incorrect I could only be a door or two away from it, and the key in my hand would be a certain test.

I went up the doorsteps—was it four or five I had counted as I came out? I fumbled for the keyhole and inserted the latchkey. It turned easily, and the door opened. I had not made a mistake. I felt an inward glow of satisfaction at having hit upon the house at the first attempt.

"It must have been a blind man who first discovered that Necessity is the mother of Invention," I said, as I softly closed the door behind me and prepared to creep up to my own room.

I wondered what the time was. All I knew was that it must be still night, for I was able to distinguish light from darkness. As I had found myself so close to Walpole street I could not have walked for any length of time in my ecstatic state, so I fancied it must be some where about two o'clock.

Even more anxious than when I started to make no noise which might awaken people, I found the bottom of the staircase and began my stealthy ascent.

Somehow, blind as I was, the place seemed unfamiliar to me. The balustrade I was touching did not seem the same. The very texture of the carpet under my feet seemed different. Could it be possible that I had entered the wrong house! There are plenty of instances on record of a key having opened a strange lock. Could I, through such a circumstance, have strayed into a neighbor's house? I paused; the perspiration rising on my brow as I thought of the awkward situation in which I should be placed if it were so. For a moment I resolved to retrace my steps and try the next house but I could not be quite sure I was wrong. Then I remembered that in my own house a bracket, with a plaster figure upon it, hung near the top of the stairs. I knew the exact place, having been cautioned many times to keep my head from knocking against it. could settle all my doubts by going on and feeling fo this land-mark: so on I went.

I ran my fingers softly along the wall, but no bracket could I find. My hand touched the lintel of a door instead. Then I knew, for certain, I was in the wrong house. The only thing to be done was to creep out as quietly as I had entered and try my luck next door.

As I turned to grope my way back I heard the murmur of voices—late as it was, there were people talking in the room, the door of which my fingers had so lightly touched.

I could not distinguish words, but I was sure the voices were those of men. I stood irresolute. Would it not be better to knock at the door and throw myself upon the mercy of the inmates of the room? I could apologize and explain. My blindness would account for the mistake. Some one would, no doubt, be kind enough to put me on my right road home. Yes, this was the best thing to do. I could not go on creeping into strange houses like a midnight thief. Perhaps each house in the row had an equally common lock, and my key might open all. If so, the end would be that some alarmed householder would put a bullet into me before I had time to assert my innocence.

Just as I raised my fingers to tap at the door I heard another voice—a woman's voice. It seemed to come from the back room and was singing to an accompaniment played softly on a piano. I paused and listened—

I have been so occupied with complaining of the hardships of my lot, I have not told you I had one solace to my misery; that merciful gift, so often bestowed on the blind, music. Had it not been for this, I believe those weeks of darkness and uncertainty would have driven me mad. Had it not been that I could pass many weary hours away playing to myself, that I could be taken to concerts and hear others play and sing, my days would have been unbearable, and I shudder to think of what aid I might have called in to render them less burdensome—

I waited and listened to the song. It was taken from an opera recently produced on the Continent, an opera not yet popularly known in England, and the song was one that few amateurs would dare to attempt. The singer, whoever she might be, sang it softly and under her voice, as though fearing to throw it out with full force. The lateness of the hour might well account for this restraint. Nevertheless, any one capable of judging must have known he was listening to no ordinary singer. It was easy to recognize the trained skill and dormant power, and imagine what, under favorable circumstances, that voice might accomplish. I was enchanted. My idea was that I had stumbled into a nest of professionals—people whose duties ended so late, that to enjoy any evening at all, night must be greatly encroached upon. All the better for me! Bohemians themselves, my unexpected nocturnal intrusion might not frighten them out of their wits.

The singer had now commenced the second verse. I placed my ear close to the door to catch every note. I was curious to hear what she would make of the effective but trying finale, when—oh, horrible contrast to the soft sweet liquid notes and subdued words of passionate love!—I heard a gasp, a spasmodic fearful gasp, that could convey but one meaning. I heard it succeeded by a long deep groan, which terminated in a gurgling sound which froze my blood. I heard the music stop suddenly, and the cry, the piercing cry of a woman ring out like a frightful change from melody to discord, and then I heard a dull heavy thud on the floor!

I waited to hear no more. I knew that some dreadful deed had been perpetrated within a few feet of where I stood. My heart beat wildly and fiercely. In the excitement of the moment I forgot that I was not like others—forgot that strength and courage could avail me nothing—forgot every thing save a desire to prevent the accomplishment of crime—the wish to do a man's duty in saving life and succoring the ones in peril. I threw open the door and rushed headlong into the room. Then as I became aware of the presence of strong light, but light which revealed nothing to me, the folly and rashness of my proceedings came fully home to me, and like a flash it crossed my mind that unarmed, blind and helpless, I had rushed into that room to meet my death.

I heard an oath—an exclamation of surprise. In the distance I heard the cry of the woman, but it sounded muffled and faint; it seemed to me that a struggle was going on in that part of the room. Powerless though I was to aid, I turned impulsively and took a couple of steps in the direction whence the cry came; my foot caught in something and I fell prostrate on the body of a man. Even in the midst of the horror that awaited me I shuddered as I felt my hand, lying on the fallen man, grow wet with some warm fluid which slowly trickled over it.

Before I could rise, strong, muscular living hands were upon my throat, holding me down, whilst a short distance off I heard the sharp click of a pistol lock. Oh, for a light for a second! If only to see those who were about to take my life, if only—strange fancy—to know n what part of me to expect the fatal bullet. And I, who some hour or two ago lay and dared to wish for death, felt at this moment that life, even my darkened life, was as dear to me as to any creature under the sun. So I cried aloud, and my voice sounded to me like the voice of a stranger—

"Spare me! I am blind! blind! blind!"

CHAPTER II.

DRUNK OR DREAMING!

THE hands pinning me down did not for an instant relax their grasp: yet they might safely have done so. Situated as I was I felt that my only chance of life was to lie still and convince, if I could, the persons in that room of the truth of my assertion. Nothing could be gained, but everything would be lost by resistance. I was strong, but, even if all the senses had been mine, I doubted if I could compete successfully with the man who held me down. I could feel the nervous power of his hands and arms. Certainly, now that I was blind and helpless, the struggle would be a short one. Besides he had companions, how many I knew not, ready to help him. The first movement I made would be the end of everything so far as I was concerned.

I made no further attempt to rise, but lay as still and unresisting as the prostrate form across which I had fallen. Every moment seemed an hour!

Think of my situation. A blind man in a strange room in a strange house—held down on the body of a man whose last groan he had just heard—held down and at the mercy of those who it was certain had just taken part in a black and cowardly crime! Unable to look into the faces of the murderers around him and learn whether their looks meant life or death to him! Expecting every moment to feel the sharp stab of a knife or the fiery sting of a bullet! Seeing nothing and feeling nothing save the hands upon his throat and the dead body beneath him! Even hearing nothing save that stifled moaning in the distance! Can the wildest flights of fiction show a parallel to my case?

Since that night I have quite disbelieved in the possibility of people's hair turning suddenly gray. If such a thing can be I must have left that room with the locks of an old man.

I can only say that even now, as, after the lapse of years, I write this; even as I see everything around me safe, still and at peace; even though I know the ones I love are close at hand, my pen trembles, my blood feels chilled and a faintness steals over me as the recollection of the most terrible moments in my life comes to me with a vividness I cannot describe.

It was well for me that I could keep still and cry again and again "I am blind—look and see!" My quiescence, the tone of my voice, may have turned the balance on which my life hung—may have carried conviction to my hearers. Presently the strong light of a lamp was perceptible to my obscured vision; a lamp placed so close to me that I could feel its hot glow upon my face; and I was aware that some one was stooping or kneeling down and peering into my eyes. His breath struck against my cheek: a short, quick, excited breath—how could it be otherwise after the deed in which he had just taken part!

At last he rose: a moment afterwards the restraining hands moved from me, and then, for the first time, I began to hope that my life might be spared.

As yet none of those around me had spoken. Now I heard voices: but whispering so softly that even my sharpened ears could not catch the purport of a single word, although I could gather that three persons at least were engaged in that hushed consultation.

All the while, like a dreary and fitting accompaniment, I could hear that stifled moaning—a woman's moaning. I would have given all I possessed—all save life—in exchange for a minute's sight, that I might have been able to comprehend what had passed and what was passing around me.

Still the whispers continued. They came thick and fast, running into and interrupting each other, as from men in hot but guarded discussion. It needed little intelligence to guess the subject of that debate! Presently they died away altogether, and, for a time, the only sound I heard was that terrible, muffled moan—that continued with a dreary monotony.

A foot touched me. "You may stand up," I heard some one say. When I burst so recklessly into the room I fancied the exclamation with which I was greeted came from foreign lips, but the man who now addressed me spoke in pure English. By this time I was beginning to recover self-possession and was able to make a mental note of these facts.

Thankful at being allowed to quit my ghastly couch, I rose. As I could think of nothing better to do I stood motionless.

"Walk this way—straight on—four paces," said the voice. I obeyed. The third step brought me in collision with the wall. No doubt this was an extra test as to the truth of my statement.

A hand was placed upon my shoulder and I was guided to a chair. "Now, sir," said the speaker who had before addressed me, "tell us, in as few words as possible, who you are—how and why you came here. Be quick, we have no time to spare."

I well knew they had no time to spare. They had much to do—much to hide. Oh, for the gift of sight for one moment! I would purchase it, even if the price were years of darkness!

Shortly and simply as I could, I told them what had brought me into such straits. The only thing I concealed was my true name. Why should these assassins know it? If I revealed it they might set a watch upon me and at any moment their safety demanded it I might share the fate of him who lay within a few feet of my chair. So I gave a fictitious name, but everything else I told them was true.

All the while I was speaking I heard that distressing sound at the other end of the room. It drove me nearly mad. I believe could I have made sure of reaching through my darkness and catching one of those men by the throat, with the certainty of crushing life out of him, I should have done so, even had such an act sealed my own fate.

When my explanation was over another whispered consultation took place. Then the spokesman demanded the key which had so nearly cost me my life. I suppose they tried it and found it acted as I said. It was not returned to me, but I heard the voice once more.

"Fortunately for you we have decided to believe your tale. Stand up." I did so and was led to another part of the room and again placed in a chair. As, after the manner of the blind, I stretched out my hands, I found I was in a corner of the room, my face turned to the angle of the walls.

"If you move or look round," said the voice, "our belief in your blindness will vanish."

It was impossible to misunderstand the grim threat conveyed by the last words. I could only sit quiet an. listen with all my ears. Yes, they had much to do They moved about busily and rapidly. I heard cupboards and drawers opened. I detected the sound of papers being torn and the smell of papers burning. I heard them raise some dead weight from the floor—heard a sound as of rent cloth and linen—heard the jingling of money, even the tick of a watch as it was drawn forth from somewhere and laid on the table near me. Then I felt a breath of air and knew that the door had been opened. I heard heavy footsteps on the stairs—the steps of men bearing a weighty burden, and I shuddered as I thought what that burden must be.

Before the last task was completed the woman's moan had ceased. For some time it had been growing fainter and only sounding at recurring intervals. Now I heard it no longer. This cessation was a great relief to my overwrought nerves, but my heart grew sick as I thought it may be there were two victims instead of one.

Although at least two men must have borne that weight away, I knew I was not left alone. I heard some one throw himself into a chair with a half weary sigh and guessed he had been left to guard me. I was longing to make my escape—longing to wake and find I had been dreaming. The suspense or the nightmare was growing unbearable. I said, without turning my head,

"How long am I to be kept amid these horrors?"

I heard the man move in his chair, but he made no answer. "May I not go?" I pleaded, "I have seen nothing. Put me out into the street—anywhere, I shall go mad if I stay here longer."

Still no answer. I said no more.

By-and-by the absent men returned to their companion. I heard the door close after them. Then came more whispers, and I heard the drawing of a cork and the jingle of glasses. They were refreshing themselves after the night's dark work.

Presently a curious odor—that of some drug was perceptible. A hand was laid on my shoulder and a glass full of some liquid was placed between my fingers.

"Drink," said the voice—the only voice I had heard.

"I will not," I cried, "it may be poison."

I heard a short harsh laugh and felt a cold metallic ring laid against my forehead.

"It is not poison; it is an opiate and will do you no harm. But this," and as he spoke I felt the pressure of the little iron circlet, "this is another affair. Choose!"

I drained the glass and was glad to feel the pistol moved from my head. "Now," said the spokesman, taking the empty glass from my hand, "if you are a wise man, when you awake to-morrow you will say, 'I have been drunk or dreaming.' You have heard us but not seen us, but remember we know you."

He left me and in a short time, do what I would to struggle against it, heavy drowsiness came over me. Thoughts grew incoherent and reason seemed leaving me. My head fell first on one side, then on the other. The last thing I can remember is a strong arm encircling me and keeping me from tumbling out of my chair. Whatever the drug was, its action was strong and swift.

For hours and hours it held me senseless, and when at last its power faded and my mind, struggling back to a clouded sort of consciousness, made, after many attempts, the fact apparent to me that I was lying on a bed, and, moreover, as I found by stretching out my arms and feeling around, my own bed, is it to be wondered at that I said to myself, "I have dreamed the most frightful dream that ever came to a tormented mind." After this effort of mind I sank back once more into a semi-conscious state, but fully persuaded I had never quitted my bed. My relief at this discovery was immense.

Yet if my mind grew easy, I cannot say the same for the body. My head seemed preparing to split in two ; my tongue was dry and parched. These unpleasant facts became more and more noticeable as consciousness gradually returned. I sat up in the bed and pressed my hands to my throbbing brows

"Oh dear heart!" I heard my old nurse say, "He is coming round at last." Then another voice—a man's voice, soft and bland.

"Yes, your master will soon be well again. Kindly let me feel your pulse, Mr. Vaughan."

A soft finger was laid upon my wrist.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"I am Doctor Deane, at your service," said the stranger.

"Have I been ill? How long? How many days?"

"A few hours only. There is nothing to be alarmed at. Lie down again and keep quiet for a while. Are you thirsty?"

"Yes, I am dying with thirst—give me water."

They did so. I drank greedily, and felt somewhat relieved.

"Now, nurse," I heard the doctor say, "make him some weak tea, and when he wants anything to eat let him have it. I will look in again later on."

Doctor Deane was shown out, and old Priscilla returning to my bedside patted and punched the pillows to make me more comfortable. By this time I was wide awake and the experiences of the night were coming back to me with a distinctness and detail far above those of a recalled dream.

What is the time?" I asked.

"Nigh upon noon, Master Gilbert." Priscilla spoke in a sorrowful injured manner.

"Noon! what has been the matter with me?"

The old servant was weeping. I could hear her. She made no answer, so I repeated my question.

"Oh, Master Gilbert!" she sobbed, "how could you do it? When I came into the room and saw the empty bed I thought I should have dropped."

When she saw the empty bed! I trembled. The horrors of the night were real!

"How could you do it, Master Gilbert?" continued Priscilla. "To go out without a word, and wander half over London, all alone and not able to see a thing!"

"Sit down and tell me what you mean—what has happened."

She had not yet quite aired her grievance. "If you wanted to get tipsy or to take any of them stuffs to send you to sleep and make you insensible, you might have done it at home, Master Gilbert. I shouldn't have minded once in a way."

"You're a kind old fool, Priscilla. Tell me all about last night."

It was not until she saw I was getting quite angry that her tongue would consent to run pretty straight, and when I heard her account of what had occurred my head was whirling. This is what she told me.

It must have been about an hour after my stealthy exit that she awoke. She put her ear to the door to make certain that I was asleep and wanting nothing. Hearing no sound of life in my room she entered it, and found the bed untenanted and me gone. Probably she was even more frightened than she owned to being. She knew all about my despondency and complainings of the last few days, and I have no doubt but her first fear was that I had destroyed myself. She started in search of me, and at once recognizing the impossibility of finding me without assistance, turned to that first and last resource of an English woman in such a difficulty—the Police. Having told her tale at the nearest station, and by entreaties, and by enlarging on my infirmity, made known the urgency of the case, and secured sympathy, telegraphic messages were sent to other police stations asking if any one answering to my description had been found. Priscilla waited upon thorns until about five o'clock in the morning, when a reply came from the other end of the town. It stated that a young man who appeared to be blind, and who was certainly drunk and incapable, had just been brought in.

Priscilla flew to the rescue. She found me lying senseless, and destined, upon my recovery, to be brought before the magistrate. A doctor was soon procured, who testified to my innocence so far as alcohol was concerned. The energetic Priscilla, after placing me safely in a cab, gave the officers a bit of her mind as to the discomforts under which she had found me laboring. She then departed triumphantly with her unconscious charge, and laid him on the bed he had so rashly quitted.

I am grieved to be compelled to gather from her words, that, in spite of the indignation she displayed towards the policemen, her estimate of my condition was the same as theirs. She was particularly grateful to the doctor, whom, I fear, she looked upon as a clever and complaisant practitioner, who had extricated a gentleman from a scrape by a well-timed but untruthful explanation.

"But I never knew a body stop insensible so long after it. Don't ee do it again, Master Gilbert," she concluded.

I did not combat her suspicions. Priscilla was scarcely the one to whom I wished to confide the adventures of the night. By far the simplest way was to say nothing, to leave her to draw her own, and, perhaps, not unnatural conclusions.

"I won't do it again," I said. "Now get me some breakfast. Tea and toast—anything."

She went to do my bidding. It was not that I was hungry. I wanted to be alone for a few minutes, to think—or think as well as my aching head would allow.

I recalled everything that had happened since I left the door of my house. The entranced walk, the drunken guide, the song I had heard, and, afterwards, those horrible, eloquent sounds and touches. Everything was clear and connected up to the moment the opiate was forced upon me: after that my mind was a blank. Priscilla's tale showed me that during that blank I must have been transported several miles and deposited in the thoroughfare where I was found by the policeman. I saw through the crafty scheme. I had been dropped, insensible, far away from the scene of the crime at which I had been present. How wild and improbable my tale would seem. Would any one believe it?

Then I remembered my horror at what I felt streaming over my hand as I lay pinned down upon the fallen man. I called Priscilla.

"Look," I said, holding my right hand towards her 'is it clean—was it clean when you found me?"

"Clean—la, no, Master Gilbert!"

"What was on it?" I asked, excitedly.

"All covered with mud, just as if you'd been dabbling in the gutter. The first thing I did when I got you home was to wash your poor hands and face. I hoped it would bring you around—it generally does, you know.'

"But my coat sleeve—my shirt sleeve. The right hand side. See if anything is on them."

Priscilla laughed. "You haven't got ne'er a right hand sleeve left. They were cut or torn off above the elbow. Your arm was naked."

Every scrap of circumstantial evidence which would confirm my tale was vanishing away. There would be nothing to support it except the assertion of a blind man, who left his house in the dead of night, secretly, and who was found, several hours afterwards, miles away, in such a state that the guardians of the public morals were compelled to take charge of him.

Yet I could not remain silent with the knowledge of such a crime weighing on my mind. The next day I had entirely recovered from the effects of the opiate, and after consideration sent for my solicitor. He was a confidential friend, and I resolved to be guided by his advice. In a very short time I found it was hopeless to think of carrying conviction to his mind. He listened gravely, giving vent to "Well, well!" "Bless my soul!" "Shocking!" and other set expressions of surprise, but I knew he was only humoring me, and looked upon the whole thing as a delusion. I have no doubt that Priscilla had been talking to him and telling him all she knew. His incredulity annoyed me, so I told him, testily, I should say no more about the affair.

"Well, I wouldn't if I were you," he said.

"You don't believe me?"

I believe you are saying what you think is true; but if you ask me, my opinion is that you walked in your sleep and dreamed all this."

Too cross to argue with him, I took his advice, so far as he was concerned, and said no more about it. Afterwards I tried another friend with a similar result. If those who had known me from childhood would not believe me, how could I expect strangers to do so? Every thing I had to reveal was so vague and unsupported. I could not even fix upon the spot where the crime was committed. I had ascertained that no house in Walpole street could be opened by a key similar to mine. There was no other street of that name any where near. My friend with the unsteady feet must have misunderstood me, and conducted me to another row of houses

I thought, at one time, of advertising and asking him to communicate with me, but I could not word a request which should be intelligible to him, without, perchance, exciting the suspicions of those who were concerned in the crime. Even now, if they had discovered my true name and abode, there might be some one on the watch for any movement I might make. I had been spared once, but no mercy would be shown me a second time. Why should I risk my life by making disclosures which would not be believed—accusations against men who were unknown to me? What good could I do? By now the assassins must have hidden all trace of the crime, and made good their retreat. Why should I face the ridicule which must attach to such a tale as mine, the truth of which I could not prove? No; let the horrors of that night be as a dream. Let them fade and be forgotten.

Soon I have something else to think of; something that may will drive such dismal memories from my mind. Hope has become certainty. I am almost delirious with delight. Science has triumphed. My defeated foe has left me. I am told his return is almost beyond possibility. The world is light again! I can see!

But my cure was a long and tedious affair. Both eyes were operated upon. First one, and, when the success of that operation was assured, the other. It was months before I was allowed to emerge altogether from darkness. Light was doled out to me sparingly and cautiously. What did that matter so long that I knew there was light again for me? I was patient, very patient and grateful. I followed Mr. Jay's instructions to the letter, knowing I should reap the reward of so doing.

My case has been treated by the simplest and safest method of operation—the one which is always chosen when the nature of the disease and the age of the patient permits—solution or absorption it is termed

When it was all over, and all danger of inflammation at an end; when I found that by the aid of strong convex glasses I could see well enough for all ordinary purposes, Mr. Jay congratulated both himself and me. It promised, he said, to be the most thoroughly successful cure he had ever taken part in. It must have been something above the common, as I am informed that every book on the eye which has since been published cites my case as an example of what may be done.

Not until my dying day shall I forget that time when my cure was declared a fact; when the bandages were removed, and I was told I might now use, sparingly, my uncurtained eyes.

The joy, from what seemed never ending night, to wake and see the sun, the stars—the clouds sped by the wind across the fair blue sky! To see green branches swaying with the breeze, and throwing trembling shadows on my path! To mark the flower; a bud but yesterday—to-day a bloom! To watch the broad bright sea grow splendid with the crimson of the west! To gaze on pictures, people, mountains, streams—to know shape, color, form and tint! To see, not hear alone, the moving lips and laugh of those who grasped my hand and spoke kind words!

To me, in those first days of new-born light, the face of every woman, man and child seemed welcome as the face of some dear friend, long lost and found again!

After this description of my ecstasy it seems pure bathos to say that the only thing which detracted from it was my being obliged to wear those strong convex glasses. I was young, and they were horribly disfiguring.

"Shall I never be able to do without them?" I asked, rather ruefully.

"That," replied Mr. Jay, "is a point upon which I wish to speak to you. You will never be able to do without *glasses*. Remember, I have destroyed, absorbed, dissolved the glasses in your eyes called crystalline lenses. Their place is now supplied by the fluid humor. This has a high refracting power. Very often if you don't give in to Nature she will give in to you. If you can take the trouble to coerce her, she will gradually meet you. If any one should do this, it is you. You are young; you have no profession, and your bread does not depend upon your sight. Glasses you must always wear, but if you insist that Nature shall act without such strong aids as these, the chances are she will at last consent to do so. It is a tedious process few have been able or have had patience to persevere; bu my experience is that in many instances it may be done."

I determined it should be done. I followed his advice. At great personal incovenience I wore glasses which only permitted me to say I could see at all. But my reward came. Slowly, very slowly, I found my sight growing stronger, till, in about two years' time, I could, by the aid of glasses, the convexity of which was so slight as to be scarcely noticeable, see as well as most of my fellow creatures. Then I began once more to enjoy life.

I cannot say that, during those two years spent in perfecting my cure, I thought no more about that terrible night; but I made no further attempt to unravel the mystery, or to persuade any one that I had not imagined those events. I buried the history of my adventure in my heart, and never again spoke of it. In case of need, I wrote down all the particulars, and then tried to banish all memory of what I had heard. I succeeded fairly well except for one thing. I could not for any long period keep my thoughts from the remembrance of that woman's moaning—that pitiable transition of voice from sweet melody to hopeless despair. It was that cry which troubled my dreams, if ever I dreamed of that night—it was that cry which rang in my ears as I awoke, trembling but thankful to find that this time, at least, I was only dreaming.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAIREST SIGHT OF ALL.

IT is spring—the beautiful spring of Northern Italy. My friend Kenyon and I are lounging about in the ectangular city of Turin, as happy and idle a pair o comrades as may anywhere be met with. We have been here a week, long enough to do all the sight-seeing demanded by duty. We have seen San Giovanni and the churches. We have toiled, or beasts of burden have toiled with us, up La Superga, where we have gazed at the mausoleum of Savoy's princely line. We have seen enough of the cumbrous old Palazzo Madama, which frowns at our hotel across the Piazzi Castello. We have marvelled at the plain, uninteresting looking Palazzo Reale, and our mirth has been moved by the grotesque brickwork decoration of the Palazzo Carignano. We have criticised the rather poor picture gallery. In fact we have done Turin thoroughly, and, with the contempt bred by familiarity, are ceasing to feel like pitiful little atoms as we stand in the enormous squares and crane our necks looking at Marochetti's immense bronze statues.

Our tasks are over. We are now simply loafing about and enjoying ourselves; revelling in the delicious weather, and trying to make up our languid but contented minds as to when we shall leave the town and where our next resting place shall be.

We wander down the broad Via di Po, lingering now and then to peer into the enticing shops which lurk in its shady arcades ; we pass through the spacious Piazzi Vittorio Emanuele; we cross the bridge whose five granite arches span the classic Po ; we turn opposite the doomed church and soon are walking up the wide shaded path which leads to the Capuchin Monastery ; the broad terrace in front of which is our favorite haunt

Here we can lounge and see the river at our feet, the great town stretching from its further bank, the open plain beyond the town, and, far, far away in the back ground, the glorious snow-capped Alps, with Monte-Rosa and Grand-Paradis towering above their brothers. No wonder we enjoy the view from this terrace more than churches, palaces or pictures.

We gaze our fill, then retrace our steps and saunter back as lazily as we came. After lingering a few moments at our hotel some hazy destination prompts us to cross the great square, past the frowning old castle, leads us up the Via di Seminario, and we find ourselves for the twentieth time in front of San Giovanni. I stop with my head in the air admiring what architectural beauties its marble front can boast, and as I am trying to discover them am surprised to hear Kenyon announce his intention of entering the building.

"But we have vowed a vow," I said, "that the interior of churches, picture galleries, and other tourist traps shall know us no more."

"What makes the best men break their vows?"

"Lots of things, I suppose."

"But one thing in particular. Whilst you are staring up at pinnacles and buttresses, and trying to look as if you knew architecture as well as Ruskin, the fairest of all sights, a beautiful woman, passes right under your nose."

"I understand—I absolve you."

"Thank you. She went into the church. I feel devotional, and will go too."

"But our cigars?"

"Chuck them to the beggars. Beware of miserly habits, Gilbert; they grow on one."

Knowing that Kenyon was not the man to abandon a a choice Havana without a weighty reason, I did as he suggested and followed him into the dim cool shades of San Giovanni.

No service was going on. The usual little parties of sightseers were walking about and looking much impressed as beauties they could not comprehend were being pointed out to them. Dotted about here and there were silent worshippers. Kenyon glanced round eagerly in quest of "the fairest of all sights," and after a while discovered her.

"Come this way," he said; "let us sit down and pretend to be devout Catholics. We can catch her profile here."

I placed myself next to him, and saw a few seats from us an old Italian woman kneeling and praying fervently, whilst in a chair at her side sat a girl of about twenty-two.

A girl who might have belonged to almost any country. The eyebrows and cast down lashes said that her eyes were dark, but the pure pale complexion, the delicate straight features, the thick brown hair might, under circumstances, have been claimed by any nation, although had I met her alone I should have said she was English. She was well but plainly dressed, and her manner told me she was no stranger to the church. She did not look from side to side, and up and down, after the way of a sightseer. She sat without moving until her companion had finished her prayers. So far as one could judge from her appearance she was in church for no particular object, neither devotional nor critical. Probably she may have come to bear the old woman at her side company. This old woman, who had the appearance of a superior kind of servant, seemed, from the passionate appeals she was addressing to heaven, to be in want of many things. I could see her thin lips working incessantly, and although her word were inaudible, it was evident her petitions were heart spoken and sincere.

But the girl by her side neither joined her in her prayers nor looked at her. Ever motionless as a statue—her eyes ever cast down—apparently wrapped in deep thought, and, I fancied, sad thought, she sat, showing us the while no more of her face than that perfect profile. Kenyon had certainly not over-praised her. Hers was a face which had a peculiar attractiveness for me, the utter repose of it not being the least of that charm. I was growing very anxious to see her full face; but as I could not do so without positive rudeness, was compelled to wait until she might chance to turn her head.

Presently the old Italian woman ppeared to think she had done her religious duty. Seeing she was preparing to cross herself I rose and sauntered down the church towards the door. In a few minutes the girl and her companion passed me, and I was able to see her to better advantage, as she waited whilst the old woman dipped her fingers in the holy water. She was undoubtedly beautiful; but there was something strange in her beauty. I made this discovery when, for a moment, her eyes met mine. Dark and glorious as those eyes were there was a dreamy, far-away look in them—a look that seemed to pass over one and see what was behind the object gazed at. This look gave me a curious impression, but, as it was only for a second that my eyes met hers, I could scarcely say whether the impression was a pleasant or an unpleasant one.

The girl and her attendant lingered a few moments at the door, so that Kenyon and I passed out before them. By common consent we paused outside. The action may have been a rude one, but we were both anxious to see the departure of the girl whose appearance had so greatly interested us. As we came through the door of the church, I noticed a man standing near the steps—a middle-aged man of gentlemanly appearance. He was rather round-shouldered, and wore spectacles. Had I felt any interest in determining his station in life, I should have adjudged him to one of the learned professions. There could be no mistake as to his nationality; he was Italian to the backbone. He was evidently waiting for some one; and when the girl, followed by the old woman, came out of San Giovanni, he stepped forward and accosted them.

The old woman gave a little sharp cry of surprise. She took his hand and kissed it. The girl stood apparently apathetic. It was evident that the gentleman's business lay with the old servant. He spoke a few words to her; then drawing her aside, the two walked away to some distance, under the shadow of the church, and to all appearance were talking earnestly and volubly, but ever and anon casting a look in the direction of the girl.

As her companion left her she walked on a few paces, then paused and turned as though waiting for the old woman. Now it was that we were able to see her perfect figure, and erect carriage to full advantage. Being some little way off, we could look at her without committing an act of rudeness or indiscretion.

"She is beautiful," I said, more to myself than to Kenyon.

"Yes, she is—but not so beautiful as I thought. There is something wanting, yet it is impossible to say what it is. Is it animation or expression?"

"I can see nothing wanting," I said, so enthusiastically that Kenyon laughed aloud.

"Do English gentlemen stare at their own countrywomen and appraise them in public places like this; or is it a custom adopted for the benefit of Italians?"

This impudent question was asked by some one close to my side. We turned simultaneously, and saw a tall man of about thirty standing just behind us. His features were regular, but their effect was not a pleasant one. You felt at a glance that a sneering mouth was curtained by the heavy mustache, and that those dark eyes and eyebrows were apt to frown with sullen anger. At present, the man's expression was that of haughty arrogance—a peculiarly galling expression, especially so I find when adopted by a foreigner towards an Englishman. That he was a foreigner it was easy to see, in spite of his perfectly accented English.

A hot reply was upon my lips, but Kenyon, who was a young man of infinite resource and well able to say and do the right thing in the right place, was before me. He raised his hat and made a sweeping bow, so exquisitely graduated that it was impossible to say where apology ended and mockery began.

"Signor," he said, "an Englishman travels through your fair land to see and praise all that is beautiful in nature and art. If our praise offends we apologize."

The man scowled, hardly knowing whether my friend was in jest or in earnest.

"If we have done wrong will the Signor convey our apologies to the lady? His wife, or shall I say his daughter?"

As the man was young, the last question was sarcastic.

"She is neither," he rapped out. Kenyon bowed.

"Ah, then a friend. Let me congratulate the Signor, and also congratulate him on his proficiency in our language."

The man was growing puzzled; Kenyon spoke so pleasantly and naturally.

"I have spent many years in England," he said, shortly

"Many years! I should scarcely have thought so, as the Signor has not picked up that English peculiarity which is far more important than accent or idiom."

Kenyon paused and looked into the man's face so innocently and inquiringly that he fell into the trap

"And pray what may that be?" he asked.

"To mind one's own business," said Kenyon, shortly and sharply, turning his back to the last speaker, as if the discussion was at an end.

The tall man's face flushed with rage. I kept my eye upon him, fearing he would make an assault upon my friend, but he thought better of it. With a curse he turned on his heel, and the matter ended.

While this conversation was in progress, the old Italian woman had left her learned-looking friend, and having rejoined the young girl, the two went upon their way. Our ill-conditioned Italian, after his discomfiture, walked across to the man who had been talking to the old servant, and taking his arm went with him in another direction. They were soon out of sight.

Kenyon did not propose to follow the steps of the first couple, and I, even had I wished to do so was ashamed to suggest such a thing. Still, I am afraid that a resolution as to visiting San Giovanni again to-morrow was forming in my mind.

But I saw her no more. How many times I went to that church I dare not say. Neither the fair girl nor her attendant crossed my path again whilst in Turin. We met our impertinent friend several times in the streets, and were honored by a dark scowl which passed unnoticed ; but of that sweet girl with the pale face and strange dark eyes we caught no glimpse.

It would be absurd to say I had fallen in love with a woman I had seen only for a few minutes—to whom I had never spoken—whose name and abode were unknown to me ; but I must confess that so far as looks went, I was more interested in this girl than in any one I had ever seen. Beautiful as she was, I could scarcely say why I felt this attraction or fascination. I had met many, many beautiful women. Yet for the slender chance of seeing this one again I lingered on in Turin until Kenyon—my good tempered friend's patience was quite exhausted — until he declared, that unless I quitted it at once, he would go away alone. At last I gave in. Ten days had passed by without the chance encounter I was waiting for. We folded up our tents and started for fresh scenes.

From Turin we went southwards—to Genoa, Florence, Rome and Naples, and other minor places ; then we went across to Sicily, and at Palermo, according to arrangement, were received on board a yacht belonging to another friend. We had taken our journey easily ; staying as long as it suited us in each town we visited, so that by the time the yacht had finished her cruise and borne us back to England, the summer was nearly over.

Many and many a time since leaving Turin I had thought of the girl I had seen at San Giovanni—thought of her so often that I laughed at myself for my folly Until now I had never carried in my mind for so long a period the remembrance of a woman's face There must, for me, have been something strangely bewitching in her style of beauty. I recalled every feature—I could, had I been an artist, have painted her portrait from memory. Laugh at my folly as I would, I could not conceal from myself that short as the time was during which I had seen her, the impression made upon me was growing stronger each day, instead of fainter. I blamed myself for leaving Turin before I had met her again—even if for that purpose it had been necessary to linger there for months. My feeling was that by quitting the place I had lost a chance which comes to a man but once in a lifetime.

Kenyon and I parted in London. He was going to Scotland after grouse, I had not yet quite settled my autumn plans, so resolved to stay, at any rate, for a few days, in town.

Was it chance or was it fate? The first morning after my arrival in London, business led me to Regent street. I was walking slowly down the broad thoroughfare, but my thoughts were far away. I was trying to argue away an insane longing which was in my mind—a longing to return at once to Turin. I was thinking of the dim church and the fair young face I saw three months ago. Then, as in my mind's eye I saw that girl and her old attendant in church, I looked up, and here in the heart of London they stood before me!

Amazed as I was, no thought of being mistaken entered my head. Unless it was a dream or an illusion, there came the one I had been thinking of so often, walking towards me, with the old woman at her side. They might have just stepped out of San Giovanni. There was a little change in the appearance of the old woman: she was dressed more like an English servant; but the girl was the same. Beautiful, more beautiful than ever, I thought as my heart gave a great leap. They passed me; I turned impulsively and followed them with my eyes.

Yes, it was fate! Now I had found her in this unexpected manner I would take care not to lose sight of her again. I attempted to disguise my feelings no longer. The emotion which had thrilled me as I stood once more face to face with her told me the truth. I was in love —deeply in love. Twice, only twice, I had seen her, but that was enough to convince me that if my lot was ever linked with another's, it must be with this woman's, whose name, home or country, I knew not.

There was only one thing I could now do. I must follow the two women. So, for the next hour or more, wherever they went, at a respectful distance, I followed. I waited whilst they entered one or two shops, and when their walk was resumed discreetly dogged their steps. I kept so far in the rear that my pursuit was bound to be unnoticed and could cause no annoyance. They soon turned out of Regent street and walked on until they came to one of those many rows of houses in Maida vale. I marked the house they entered, and as I passed by it, a few minutes afterwards, saw in the front window the girl arranging a few flowers in a vase. It was evident I had ascertained her abode.

It was fate! I was in love and could only act as my passion impelled me. I must find out all about this unknown; I must make her acquaintance and so obtain the right of looking into those strange but beautiful eyes. I must hear her speak. I laughed again at the absurdity of being in love with a woman whose voice I had never heard, whose native language was a matter of uncertainty. But then, love is full of absurdities. When once he gets the whip hand he drives us in strange ways.

I formed a bold resolve. I retraced my steps and walked up to the house. The door was opened by a tidy-looking servant.

"Have you any rooms to let?" I asked; having jumped at the conclusion that the unknown was only lodging at the house.

The servant replied in the affirmative, and upon my expressing a wish to see the vacant rooms I was shown a dining-room and bed-room on the ground floor.

Had these rooms been dungeons instead of cheerful airy apartments—had they been empty and bare instead of comfortably furnished—had the rent been fifty pounds a week instead of the moderate sum asked, I should have engaged them. I was very easy to deal with. The landlady was summoned and the bargain struck at once. If that good person had known the state of my mind she might have reaped a golden harvest from her ground floor apartments. As it was, the only thing she was exacting in was in the matter of references. I named several, then I paid a month's rent in advance and received her permission, as I had just returned to England and wanted a home at once, to enter into possession that very evening.

"By-the-by," I said carelessly, as I left the house to get my luggage, "I forgot to ask if you have other lodgers—no children, I hope?"

"No sir—only a lady and her servant. They are on the first floor—very quiet people."

"Thank you," I said. "I dare say I shall be very comfortable. You may expect me about seven o'clock."

I had re-engaged my old rooms in Walpole street before the meeting with my unknown had changed my plans. I went back there, and after packing up all I wanted, informed the people of the house that I was going to stay at a friend's for a few weeks. The rooms were to be kept for me all the same. At seven o'clock I was at Maida vale and duly installed.

It was the hand of fate had wrought this—who could doubt it? This morning I was almost on my way to Turin in search of my love. This evening I am beneath the same roof. As I sit here in my arm-chair and see all kinds of beautiful visions wreathed in the smoke curling from my cigar, I can scarcely believe that she is within a few feet of me—that I shall see her to-morrow—the next day—forever and ever! Yes, I am hopelessly in love—I go to bed thinking I shall dream of her; but, probably owing to the strange quarters, my dreams are far less pleasant. All night long I dream of the blind man who walked into a strange house and heard such fearful sounds!

CHAPTER IV.

NOT FOR LOVE OR MARRIAGE.

A WEEK has passed by. I am more in love than ever. I am now satisfied as to the thoroughness of my passion; certain that this sudden love of mine will endure as long as my life ; that it is no transient flush to fade away with time or absence. Whether my suit be successful or not this woman will be my first and last love.

As yet I have made little progress in the furthering of my desire. I see her every day, because I watch for her coming and going; and every time I see her, I find fresh charms in her face and graces in her figure. Yet Kenyon was right. Hers is a peculiar style of beauty That pale pure face, those dark dreamy far-away eyes, are out of the common run of womanhood. It may be this accounts for the strange fascination she has for me. Her carriage is upright and graceful; she walks always at the same pace; her face is always grave, and it seems to me she seldom speaks to that old companion or servant who never quits her side. I am beginning to look upon her as a riddle, and wonder if the key will ever be mine.

I have found out some few things about her. Her name is Pauline—a sweet and suitable name—Pauline March. She is therefore English, although I sometimes hear her saying a few words in Italian to old Teresa, her servant. She seems to know no one, and, so far as I can learn, no one knows more about her than I do—I, at least, know she came from Turin, and that is more than my informants were aware of.

I still occupy my rooms, waiting my chance. It is tantalizing to live in the same house with the one you love, and find no opportunity of even commencing the siege. That old Teresa guards her charge like a thorough-bred Spanish duenna. Her dark eyes glance quickly and suspiciously at me whenever I meet the two women, and bid them the good-morning or good-evening which a fellow-lodger may venture upon. As yet I have got no further than these cold civilities. Pauline's eyes and manner give me no encouragement. She acknowledges my salutation gravely, distantly and apathetically. It is clear to me that love at first sight is not bound to be reciprocal. I comfort myself by thinking that Fate must have something in store for me, or Pauline and I would never have been brought face to face again.

So all I can do is to lurk behind the thick red curtains of my window and watch my love, guarded by that old cat Teresa, go out and come in. I am obliged now to exercise due caution in this proceeding, as the duenna once caught sight of me, and now each time they pass I see her fierce eyes peering into my hiding-place. I am beginning to hate Teresa.

Yet if I have done little, I am in the same house, breathing the same air as Pauline, and I am a patient man and can wait for my opportunity. It will be sure to come at last.

This is how it came. One evening I heard a fall, a clatter of china and a cry of distress. I ran out of my room and found Teresa lying on the stairs amid the ruins of the landlady's best tea-set, and groaning earnestly. My chance had come!

With the shameless hypocrisy of love, I ran to her aid, as eager to help her as though she had been my mother. I endeavored, in the most tender manner, to raise her; but she sank back, wailing out something about, "one of ze foots broke."

It was clear that Teresa's English was not her strong point; so I asked her in Italian what was the matter. She brightened up as she heard her own language, and I found that she had sprained her knee so severely that she was unable to rise. I told her that I would carry her to her room, and without more ado picked her up and bore her upstairs.

Pauline was standing on the landing. Her large dark eyes were opened wide, her whole appearance that of affright. I paused a moment and explained what had happened, then I took the old woman into the room which she occupied and laid her on the bed. The servant of the house was sent for a doctor, and, as I retired, Pauline thanked me quietly, but I fancied listlessly, for my kindness. Those dreamy eyes met mine, yet scarcely seemed to know it. Yes, I was obliged to confess it, my goddess was in manner apathetic—but then, her beauty! Those refined regular features, the girlish but well-formed figure—the thick brown hair, even those strange dark eyes. Surely there was no woman in the world to compare with her!

She gave me her hand at parting—a small well-formed soft hand. I could scarcely refrain from pressing my lips to it—I could scarcely refrain from telling her then and there that for months I had thought of her and her only—but injudicious as such proceedings might have been at a first meeting they would have been doubly so whilst old Teresa was lying and, in spite of her pains, with suspicious eyes watching every movement of mine; so I could only express a wish to be of further service to her and bow myself out discreetly.

But the ice was broken—our hands had met. Pauline and I were strangers no longer!

Old Teresa's sprain, although not such a serious affair as she fancied, kept her indoors for several days. I hoped this would enable me to improve my acquaintance with her mistress, but the result was not commensurate with the hope. For the first few days Pauline, so far as I knew, did not leave the house. Once or twice I met her on the stairs and, assuming a fictitious interest in the old woman, kept her in conversation for a minute or two. It seemed to me that she was painfully shy—so shy that the conversation I would fain have prolonged, after a little while died a natural death. I was not conceited enough to attribute her shyness and reticence to the same cause which made me blush and stammer as I spoke to her.

At last, one morning I saw her leave the house alone. I took my hat and followed her. She was walking up and down the pavement in front of the house. I joined her, and, after the usual inquiry for Teresa, continued at her side. I must make an attempt to establish matters on a better footing between us.

"You have not been long in England, Miss March?' I said.

"Some time—some months," she replied.

"I saw you in the spring at Turin—in church, at San Giovanni." She raised her eyes and met mine with a strange puzzled look.

"You were there with your old servant—one morning," I continued.

"Yes—we often went there."

"You are English, I suppose—your name is not an Italian one?"

"Yes, I am English."

She spoke as though not quite certain about it—or as if it was a matter of complete indifference.

"Your home is here—You are not going back to Italy?"

"I don't know—I cannot tell."

Pauline's manner was very unsatisfying. I made many attempts to learn something about her habits and tastes. Did she play or sing—was she fond of music, of pictures, of flowers, of the stage, of travelling? Had she many relations and friends? Directly and indirectly, I asked her all these questions.

Her replies were unsatisfactory. Either she evaded the questions, as if determined I should know nothing about her, or she did not seem to understand them. Many of them I felt sure puzzled her. At the end of our little promenade she remained as great a mystery to me as before. The only comfort I could take was that she displayed no wish to shun me. We passed and repassed the house several times, but she did not suggest re-entering, as she might have done had she wished to get rid of me. There was no trace of coquetry in her manner—quiet and reserved as I found her, she was at least simple and natural—and she was very beautiful, and I was very, very much in love!

It was not long before I discovered that old Teresa's black eyes were watching us from behind the blind of the drawing-room. She must have crept from her bed to see that her charge got into no mischief. I chafed at the espionage, but as yet it was too early to escape from it.

Before Teresa could hobble out of doors I had met Pauline more than once in the same way. She seemed, I was glad to believe, pleased when I joined her. The difficulty I labored under was to make her talk. She would listen to all I had to say without comment and without reply, save yes or no. If, by a rare chance, she asked a question or spoke a longer sentence than usual the effort was never sustained. I attributed a great deal of this to shyness and to her secluded life—for the only person she had to speak to was that terrible old Teresa.

Although every word and action of Pauline's told me she was well educated and well-bred, I was certainly surprised at her ignorance of literature. I quoted an author, mentioned a book by name, the remark passed unnoticed; or she looked at me as if puzzled by my allusion, or distressed at her own ignorance. Although I had now seen her several times, I was not satisfied at the progress I had made. I knew I had not as yet struck the key-note of her nature.

As soon as the old servant, duenna, friend, or what she was, grew well, I heard some startling news. My landlady asked me if I could recommend her apartments to any friend of mine—such another as myself she was good enough to say—Miss March was going to leave, and the landlady thought she would prefer taking a gentleman in her place.

I felt certain this was a countermove of that old hag Teresa's. She had cast venomous glances at me when we passed each other on the stairs; had responded surlily when I asked if she had quite recovered from the effects of her accident—in a word, I knew she was my enemy; that she had discovered my feelings towards

Pauline and was doing her best to keep us apart. I had no means of knowing the extent of her power or influence over the girl, but I had some time since ceased to regard her as nothing more than a servant. The intelligence that my fellow-lodgers were about to quit showed me that to bring my love for Pauline to a successful issue, I must in some way make matters straight with this unpleasant old attendant.

That same evening, as I heard her coming down the stairs, I threw open my door and stood face to face with her.

"Signora Teresa," I said, with high flown politeness, "will it please you to step into my room? I wish to speak to you."

She gave me a quick, suspicious glance, but nevertheless complied with my request. I closed the door and placed a chair for her.

"Your poor knee—is it quite well?" I asked sympathetically, and in Italian.

"It is quite well, Signor," she replied laconically.

"Will you take a glass of sweet wine? I have some here."

Teresa, in spite of our inimical relations, made no objections, so I filled a glass and watched her sip it approvingly.

"Is the Signorina—Miss March well? I have not seen her to-day."

"She is well."

"It is about her that I wish to speak to you—you have guessed that?"

"I have guessed it." As she spoke Teresa gave me a sullen, defiant look.

"Yes," I continued, "your vigilant, faithful eyes have seen what I have no wish to conceal. I love the Signorina Pauline."

"She is not to be loved," said Teresa, sulkily.

"One so beautiful must be loved. I love her and will marry her."

"She is not to be married."

"Listen, Teresa. I say I will marry her. I am a gentleman and rich. I have 50,000 lire a year."

The amount of my income, magnificent when reduced to her native coinage, was not without its expected effect. If her eyes, as they met mine, were as unfriendly as ever, their look of astonishment and increasing respect told me I was appealing to her tenderest feeling—cupidity.

"Now tell me why I should not marry the Signorina? Tell me who her friends are that I may see them and ask her in marriage."

"She is not for marriage."

This was all I could get from the old woman. She would tell me nothing about Pauline's family or friends. She would only reiterate that she was not for love or for marriage.

I had but one chance left. Teresa's eager look when I mentioned the income I possessed had impressed me. I must condescend to the vulgar act of direct bribery; the end would justify the means.

As I was so often travelling it was my habit to carry a large sum of money on my person. I drew out my pocket-book and counted out a hundred pounds in new crisp notes. Teresa eyed them hungrily.

"You know what these are worth?" I said. She nodded. I pushed a couple of the notes towards her. Her skinny hand seemed twitching with the desire to grasp them.

"Tell me who Miss March's friends are and take these two notes; all the rest shall be yours on the day we are married."

The old woman sat silent for awhile, but I knew temptation was assailing her. Presently I heard her murmuring "50,000 lire! 50,000 lire a year!" The spell worked. At last she rose. "Are you going to take the money?" I asked.

"I cannot. I dare not. I am bound. But—"

"But what?"

"I will write. I will say what you say to il dottore."

"Who is the doctor? I can write to him or see him."

"Did I say il dottore? It was a slip. No, you must not write. I will ask him and he must decide."

"You will write at once?"

"At once." Teresa, with a lingering glance at the money, turned to leave me.

"You had better take these two notes," I said, handing them to her.

She buttoned them in the bosom of her dress with feverish delight.

"Tell me, Teresa," I said coaxingly, "tell me if you think—if the Signorina—Pauline—cares at all for me?"

"Who knows," answered the old woman testily; "I do not know—but again I say to you she is not for love or marriage."

Not for love or marriage! I laughed aloud as I thought of the old woman's absurd and oft-repeated assertion. If on the earth there was one woman more than another made for love and marriage it was my beautiful Pauline! I wondered what Teresa could mean; then remembering the fervor with which she prayed in San Giovanni I decided that, being an ardent Roman Catholic, she wished Pauline to take the veil. This theory would explain everything.

Now that I had bought Teresa I looked forward to the enjoyment of Pauline's society without espionage or interruption. The old woman had taken my money, and no doubt would do her best to earn more. If I could persuade the girl to let me pass several hours of each day in her company I need fear no hindrance from Teresa. The bribe had been accepted, and, although I blushed at the expedient to which I had been compelled to resort, it had been successful.

I was obliged to defer any further attempt at love-making until the next evening, as an important piece of business had to be attended to in the morning. It kept me away from home for several hours, and when at last I returned to Maida vale I was thunderstruck to hear that my fellow-lodgers had left the house. The landlady had no idea whither they had gone. Teresa, who it appears always acted as purse-bearer, had paid her dues and had departed with her young mistress. There was nothing more to tell.

I threw myself into my chair, cursing Italian guile; yet as I thought of Italian cupidity, not altogether hopeless. Perhaps Teresa would write or come to me. I had not forgotten the eager looks she cast upon my money. But day after day passed without letter or message.

I spent those days, for the most part, wandering about the streets in the vain hope of encountering the fugitives. It was only after this second loss that I really knew the extent of my passion. I cannot describe the longing I had to see that fair face once more. Yet, I feared the love was all on my side. If Pauline had felt even a passing interest in me she could scarcely have left in this secret and mysterious manner. Her heart was yet to be won, and I knew that unless I won it no woman's love would to me be worth having.

I should have returned to my old lodgings in Walpole street had it not been that I feared to quit Maida vale, lest Teresa, if she should be faithful to her engagements, might miss me. So I lingered on there until ten days went slowly by; then, just as I was beginning to despair, a letter came.

It was written in a delicate pointed Italian style and signed Manuel Ceneri. It simply said that the writer would have the honor of calling upon me about noon to-day.

Nothing was hinted at as to the object of the visit, but I knew it could be connected with only one thing—the desire of my heart. Teresa, after all, had not played me false. Pauline would be mine. I waited with feverish impatience until this unknown Manuel Ceneri should make his appearance.

A few minutes after twelve he was announced and shown into my room. I recognized him at once. He was the middle-aged man with rather round shoulders who had talked to Teresa under the shade of San Giovanni at Turin. Doubtless he was "il dottore" spoken of by the old woman as being the arbiter of Pauline's fate.

He bowed politely as he entered, cast one quick look at me as if trying to gather what he could from my personal appearance, then seated himself in the chair I offered him.

"I make no apology for calling," he said; "you will no doubt guess why I come." His English was fluent, but the foreign accent very marked.

"I hope I guess correctly," I replied.

"I am Manuel Ceneri. I am a doctor by profession My sister was Miss March's mother. I have come from Geneva on your account."

"Then you know what the wish—the great wish of my life is?"

"Yes, I know. You want to marry my niece. Now, Mr. Vaughan, I have many reasons for wishing my niece to remain single, but your proposal has induced me to reconsider the matter."

Pauline might have been a bale of cotton, so impassively did her uncle speak of her future.

"In the first place," he went on, "I am told you are well born and rich. Is that so?"

"My family is respectable. I am well connected and may be called rich."

"You will satisfy me on the latter point, I suppose."

I bowed stiffly, and taking a sheet of paper wrote a line to my solicitors asking them to give the bearer the fullest information as to my resources. Ceneri folded up the note and placed it in his pocket. Perhaps I showed the annoyance I felt at the mercenary exactness of his inquiries.

"I am bound to be particular in this matter," he said "as my niece has nothing."

"I expect nothing or wish for nothing."

"She had money once—a large fortune. It was lost long ago. You will not ask how or where?"

"I can only repeat my former words."

"Very well—I feel I have no right to refuse your offer. Although she is half Italian her manners and habits are English. An English husband will suit her best. You have not yet, I believe, spoken of love to her?"

"I have had no opportunity. I should no doubt have done so, but as soon as our acquaintance commenced she was taken away."

"Yes, my instructions to Teresa were strict. It was only on condition she obeyed her that I allowed Pauline to live in England."

Although this man spoke as one who had absolute authority over his niece, he had not said one word which evinced affection. So far as that went, she might have been a stranger to him.

"But now, I suppose, I shall be allowed to see her?"

"Yes—on conditions. The man who marries Pauline March must be content to take her as she is. He must ask no questions, seek to know nothing of her birth and family, nothing of her early days. He must be content to know that she is a lady, that she is very beautiful, and that he loves her. Will this suffice?"

The question was such a strange one that even in the height of my passion I hesitated.

"I will say this much," added Ceneri, "she is good and pure—her birth is equal to your own. She is an orphan and her only near relative is myself."

"I am content," I cried, holding out my hand to seal the compact. "Give me Pauline, I ask no more."

Why should I not be content? What did I want to know about her family, her antecedents or her history? So madly did I long to call that beautiful girl mine that, I believe, had Ceneri told me she was worthless and disgraced among women, I should have said, "give her to me and let her begin life anew as my wife." Men do such things for love!

"Now, Mr. Vaughan," said the Italian, drawing his hand from mine; "my next question will astonish you. You love Pauline, and I believe she is not indifferent to you—"

He paused and my heart beat at the thought.

"Will your arrangements permit of an early marriage—an immediate marriage? Can I upon my return to the Continent in a few days leave her future in your hands entirely?"

"I would marry her to-day if it were possible," I cried.

"We need not be so impetuous as that—but could you arrange for, say the day after to-morrow?"

I stared at him—I could scarcely believe I heard correctly. To be married to Pauline within a few hours! There must be something in the background of such bliss! Ceneri must be a madman! Yet even from the hands of a madman how could I refuse my happiness?

"But I don't know if she loves me—would she consent?" I stammered.

"Pauline is obedient and will do as I wish. You can woo her after her marriage instead of before it."

"But can it be done on so short a notice?"

"I believe there are such things as special licenses to be bought. You are wondering at my suggestion. I am bound to return to Italy almost at once. Now, I put it to you—can I, under the present circumstances, leave Pauline here with only a servant to look after her? No, Mr. Vaughan, strange as it may seem, I must either see her your wife before I leave or I must take her back with me. The latter may be unfortunate for you, as here I have only myself to consider, whilst abroad there may be others to consult, and perhaps I must change my mind."

"Let us go to Pauline and ask her," I said, rising impatiently.

"Certainly," said Ceneri gravely, "we will go at once."

Till now I had been sitting with my back to the window. As I faced the light I noticed the Italian doctor look very straightly at me.

"Your face seems quite familiar to me, Mr. Vaughan, although I cannot recall where I have seen you."

I told him he must have seen me outside San Giovanni whilst he was talking to old Teresa. He remembered the occurrence and appeared satisfied. Then we called a cab and drove to Pauline's new abode.

It was not so very far away. I wondered I had not encountered either Pauline or Teresa in my rambles.

Perhaps they had both kept to the house to avoid the meeting.

"Would you mind waiting in the hall a minute?" asked Ceneri as we entered the house. "I will go and prepare Pauline for your coming."

I would have waited a month in a dungeon for the reward in prospect; so I sat down on the polished mahogany chair and wondered if I was in my right senses.

Presently old Teresa came to me. She looked scarcely more amiable than before.

"Have I done well?" she whispered in Italian.

"You have done well—I will not forget."

"You will pay me and blame me for nothing. But listen—once more I say it—the signorina is not for love or marriage."

Superstitious old fool! Were Pauline's charms to be buried in a nunnery!

Then a bell rang and Teresa left me. In a few minutes she re-appeared and conducted me upstairs to a room in which I found my beautiful Pauline and her uncle. She raised her dark dreamy eyes and looked at me—the most infatuated man could not have flattered himself that the light of love was in them. I fully expected that Doctor Ceneri would have left us to arrange matters alone; but no—he took me by the hand and in a stately manner led me to his niece.

"Pauline, you know this gentleman."

She bowed. "Yes, I know him."

"Mr. Vaughan, continued Ceneri, "does us the hono of asking you to be his wife."

I could not permit all my wooing to be done by proxy, so I stepped forward and took her hand in mine.

"Pauline," I whispered, "I love you—since first I saw you I have loved you—will you be my wife?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she replied softly, but without even changing color.

"You cannot love me now, but you will by-and-by—will you not, my darling?"

She did not respond to my appeal, but then she did not repulse me, neither did she strive to withdraw her hand from mine; she remained calm and undemonstrative as ever; but I threw my arm around her, and, in spite of Ceneri's presence, kissed her passionately. It was only when my lips touched her own that I saw the color rise to her cheek and knew that she was moved.

She disengaged herself from my embrace, glanced at her uncle, who stood impassive as if he had witnessed nothing out of the common, and then she fled from the room.

"I think you had better go now," said Ceneri. "I will arrange every thing with Pauline. You must do on your part all that is necessary for the day after to-morrow."

"It is very sudden," I said.

"It is, but it must be so—I cannot wait an hour longer. You had better leave me now and return to-morrow."

I went away with my head in a whirl—I was uncertain what to do. The temptation to call Pauline my own in so short a time was great; but I could not deceive myself by thinking that she cared for me at all, as yet. But, as Ceneri said, I could do my wooing after marriage. Still I hesitated. The hurried proceeding was so strange. Ardently as I desired to wed Pauline, I wished I could have first won her. Would it not be better to let her uncle take her to Italy, then to follow her and learn if she could love me? Against this prudent course came Ceneri's vague threat, that in such an event, his mind might be changed—and more than all, I was desperately in love. Although it could only be for her beauty that I loved her, I was madly in love. Fate had thrown us together. She had escaped me twice—now the third time she was offered to me unreservedly. I was superstitious enough to think that if I rejected or postponed accepting the gift, it would be withdrawn forever. No—come what will, in two days' time Pauline shall be my wife!

I saw her the next day, but never alone. Ceneri was with us all the time. Pauline was sweet, silent, shy and languid. I had much to do—much to see to.

Never was a wooing so short or so strange as mine. By the evening all arrangements were made, and by ten o'clock the next morning Gilbert Vaughan and Pauline March were man and wife—those two who had not in their lifetime even conversed for a time amounting, say, to three hours, were linked together for better or worse till death should part them!

Ceneri left immediately the ceremony was over, and to my astonishment, Teresa announced her intention of accompanying him. She did not fail to wait on me for the promised reward, which I gave her freely and fully. My heart's desire was to wed Pauline, and by her aid it had been compassed.

Then, with my beautiful bride, I started for the Scottish lakes, to begin the wooing which should have been completed before the final step had been taken.

CHAPTER V.

BY LAW, NOT LOVE.

PROUD and happy as I felt when seated side by side with Pauline in the railway carriage which was taking us to the north; fortunate as I told myself I was to have won such a fair bride; great as my love was for the sweet girl who had just vowed herself mine forever, Ceneri's extraordinary stipulation kept recurring to my mind—the man who marries Pauline March must be content to take her as she is; to wish to know nothing of her past.

Not for one moment did I think such a contract could be enforced. As soon as I had succeeded in making Pauline love me, she would surely wish to tell me all her history—there would be no need to ask for it—the confidence would then be given as a matter of course. When she had learned the secret of love, all other secrets would cease between us.

My wife looked very beautiful as she sat with her head leaning against the dark cloth of the carriage. Her clear-cut refined features showed in that position advantageously. Her face, as usual, was pale and calm; her eyes were cast down. A woman to be indeed proud of; to worship, to cherish, and—how sweet it seemed to whisper the word to myself—my wife!

Yet I suspect none would have taken us for a newly married couple. At any rate there were no nudgings and sly glances among our fellow passengers. The ceremony had been so hurried on that no attempt had been made to invest Pauline with the usual bridal accessories. Her dress, although becoming and fashionable, was the one in which I had seen her several times. Neither of us had any brand new belongings to stamp us as being bound for a honeymoon; so the only notice we attracted was the notice which was due to my wife's great and uncommon beauty.

The carriage was nearly full when we started from London, and as the strangeness of our new relations prevented our conversing in an ordinary way, by mutual consent we were all but silent; a few soft words in Italian were all I could trust myself to speak until we were alone.

At the first important station, the first place at which the train stopped for any time worth mentioning, I exercised a little diplomatic bribery, and, changing our carriage, we were installed in a compartment, the windows of which bore the magic word "engaged." Pauline and I were alone. I took her hand in mine.

"My wife!" I said passionately, "mine, only mine, forever!"

Her hand lay listless and unresisting in my own. I pressed my lips to her cheek. She shrank not from my kiss, neither did she return it—she simply suffered it.

"Pauline!" I whispered, "say once, 'Gilbert, my husband.'"

She repeated the words like a child learning a new lesson. My heart sank as her emotionless accents fell on my ears. I had a hard task before me.

I could not blame her. Why should she love me yet? Me, whose Christian name, I think, she heard yesterday for the first time? Better, far better, indifference than simulated love. She had become my wife simply because her uncle wished it. I could at least comfort myself by thinking the marriage had not been forced upon her; also that, so far as I could see, she entertained no dislike to me. I did not for one moment despair. I must now woo her humbly and reverently, as every man should woo his love. Certainly, as her husband, I did not stand in a worse position than when I was her fellow lodger and old Teresa was following my every movement with her black suspicious eyes.

I would win her, but until I could claim the rights which love would give, I resolved to take none of those with which the law had invested me. None save this, and this only once.

"Pauline," I said, "will you kiss me? Only once I ask it. It will make me happier; but if you would rather wait until we are better acquainted, I shall not complain."

She leaned forward and kissed my forehead. Her young lips were red and warm, but they chilled me—in that kiss there was not a suspicion of the passion which was thrilling me.

I drew my hand from hers, and, still sitting beside her, began to do my best to make myself agreeable to the woman I loved. If I felt distressed and somewhat disappointed, I concealed it and strove to talk pleasantly and naturally—tried to ascertain what manner of woman I had married—to get at her likes and dislikes—to study her disposition—to determine her tastes—learn her wishes—read her thoughts, and eventually to make her regard me as one who would spend his life in rendering her happy.

When was it the idea first struck me—the horrible idea that even the peculiarity and novelty of situation could not altogether account for Pauline's apathy and lack of animation—that shyness alone could not be entirely responsible for the difficulty I experienced in making her talk to me, even in inducing her to answer my questions? I made every excuse for her. She was tired; she was upset; she could think of nothing else save the rash and sudden step taken to-day—more rash for her than for me—as I, at least, knew that I loved her. At last I, too, sank into silence, and miles and hours went by, whilst the bride and bridegroom sat side by side without exchanging a word, much less a caress. It was a strange situation—a strange journey!

And on and on the train rushed northwards—on and on until the dusk began to creep over the flying country; and I sat and looked at the listless beautiful girl at my side, and wondered what our future life would be; but I did not despair, although the rattle of the train as it whirled along seemed to resolve itself into a dreamy rhythm, and reiterated without ceasing old Teresa's sullen words, "She is not for love or marriage—not for love or marriage."

Darker and darker it grew outside, and as the carriage light fell on the pure, white face of the girl beside me; as I watched its never changing expression; its beautiful but never varying pallor, a strange fear came over me—a fear lest she was wrapped in an armor of ice which no love would ever thaw. Then tired, weary and almost dispirited I sank into a kind of sleep. The last thing I could remember before my eyes closed was that, in spite of my resolution, I took that white, well-shaped passive hand in mine, and slept still holding it.

Sleep! Yes, it was sleep, if sleep means anything but rest and peace. Never, since the night I heard it, had that woman's stifled moaning come back to me so clearly; never had my dreams so nearly approached the reality of the terror which the blind man had felt years ago. Right thankful I was when the haunting cry rose shriller and shriller, and, at last, culminated by resolving itself into the shrieking whistle which told me we were near to Edinburgh. I loosed my wife's hand and recalled my senses. That dream must have been a vivid one, for it left me with the beads of perspiration clammy on my brow.

Never having been to Edinburgh, and wishing to see something of the city, I had proposed staying there for two or three days. During the journey I had suggested this to my wife. She had agreed to it as though place or time was a matter of little moment to her. Nothing, it seemed to me, awoke her interest!

We drove to the hotel and supped together. From our manner we might, at the most, have been friends. Our intercouse, for the time, being confined to the usual civilities shown by a gentleman towards a lady in whose society he is thrown. Pauline thanked me for any little attention to her comfort, and that was all. The journey had been a long and trying one—she looked wearied out.

"You are tired, Pauline," I said, "would you like to go to your room?"

"I am very tired." She spoke almost plaintively.

"Good-night, then," I said; "to-morrow you will feel better, and we will look at the lions of the place."

She rose, we shook hands and said good-night. Pauline retired to her apartment whilst I went out for a ramble through the gas-lighted streets, and with a sad heart recalled the events of the day.

Husband and wife? The bitter mockery of the words. For in every thing except the legal bond Pauline and I were as far apart as we were on that day when first I saw her at Turin. Yet this morning we had vowed to love and cherish each other till death did us part. Why had I been rash enough to take Ceneri at his word. Why not have waited until I had ascertained that the girl could love me, or at least ascertained that she had the power of loving at all? The apathy and utter indifference she displayed fell like a chill upon my heart. I had done a foolish thing—a thing that could never be undone. I must bear the consequences. Still I would hope—hope, particularly, for what to-morrow might bring forth.

I walked about for a long time, thinking over my strange position. Then I returned to the hotel and sought my own apartment. It was one of the suite of rooms I had engaged and next to my wife's. I dismissed, as well as I could, all hopes and fears until the morning came, and, tired with the day's events, at last slept.

My bride and I did not visit the Lakes as I had planned. In two days' time I had learned the whole truth—learned all I could know—all that I might ever know about Pauline. The meaning of the old woman's repeated phrase, "she is not for love or marriage," was manifested to me. The reason why Dr. Ceneri had stipulated that Pauline's husband should be content to take her without inquiring into her early life was clear. Pauline—my wife—my love, had no past!

Or no knowledge of the past. Slowly at first, then with swift steps, the truth came home to me. Now I knew how to account for that puzzled, strange look in those beautiful eyes—knew the reason for the indifference, the apathy, she displayed. The face of the woman I had married was fair as the morn; her figure as perfect as that of a Grecian statue; her voice low and sweet; but the one thing which animates every charm—the mind—was missing!

How shall I describe her? Madness means something quite different from her state. Imbecility would still less convey my meaning. There is no word I can find which is fitting to use. There was simply something missing from her intellect—as much missing as a limb may be from a body. Memory, except for comparatively recent events, she seemed to have none. The power of reasoning, weighing and drawing deductions seemed beyond her grasp. She appeared unable to recognize the importance or bearing of occurrences taking place around her. Sorrow and delight were emotions she was incapable of feeling. Nothing appeared to move her. Unless her attention was called to them she noticed neither persons nor places. She lived as by instinct—rose, ate, drank and lay down to rest as one not knowing why she did so. Such questions or remarks as came within the limited range of her capacity she replied to—those outside it passed unheeded, or else the shy troubled eyes sought for a moment the questioner's face, and left him as mystified as I had been when first I noticed that curious inquiring look.

Yet she was not mad. A person might have met her out in company, and after spending hours in her society might have carried away no worse impression than that she was shy and reticent. Whenever she did speak, her words were as those of a perfectly sane woman; but as a rule her voice was only heard when the ordinary necessities of life demanded, or in reply to some simple question. Perhaps, I should not be far wrong in comparing her mind to that of a child—but, alas! it was a child's mind in a woman's body—and that woman was my wife!

Life to her, so far as I could see, held neither mental pleasure nor pain. Considered physically, I found that she was more influenced by heat and cold than by any other agents. The sun would tempt her out of doors, or the cold wind would drive her in. She was by no means unhappy. She seemed quite content to sit by my side, or to walk or drive with me for hours without speaking. Her whole existence was a negative one.

And she was sweet and docile. She followed every suggestion of mine, fell in with every plan, was ready to go here, there, or every where, as I wished; but her compliance and obedience were as those of a slave to a new master. It seemed to me that all her life she must have been accustomed to obey some one. It was this habit which had so misled me—had almost made me think that Pauline loved me, or she would not have consented to that hasty marriage. Now, I knew that her ready obedience to her uncle's command was really due to the inability of her mind to offer resistance, and its powerlessness to comprehend the true meaning of the step she was taking.

Such was Pauline, my wife! A woman in her beauty and grace of person; a child in her clouded and unformed or stunted mind! And I her husband, a strong man craving for love, might win from her, perchance, at last, what might be compared to the affection of a child to its parent, or a dog to his master.

As the truth, the whole truth, came home to me, I am not ashamed to say that I lay down and wept in bitter grief.

I loved her even now I knew all! I would not even have undone the marriage. She was my wife—the only woman I had ever cared for. I would fulfill my vow—would love her and cherish her. Her life, at least, should be as happy as my care could make it. But all the same I vowed I would have a fitting reckoning with that glib Italian doctor.

Him, I felt it was necessary I should see at once. From him I would wring all particulars. I would learn if Pauline had always been the same—if there was any hope that time and patient treatment would work an improvement. I would learn, moreover, the object of his concealment. I would, I swore, drag the truth from him, or it should cost him dear. Until I stood face to face with Ceneri I should find no peace.

I told Pauline it was necessary we should return to London immediately. She betrayed no surprise; raised no objection. She made her preparations at once, and was ready to accompany me when I willed it. This was another thing about her which puzzled me. So far as things mechanical went, she was as other people. In her toilet, even in her preparations for a journey, she needed no assistance. All her actions were those of a perfectly sane person; it was only when the mind was called upon to show itself that the deficiency became at all apparent.

It was gray morning when we reached Euston Station. We had travelled all night. I smiled bitterly as I stepped on to the platform; smiled at the contrast between my thoughts of to-day and those of a few mornings ago when I handed the wife I had so strangely won into the train, and told myself as I followed her, that a life of perfect happiness was now about to begin.

And yet how fair the girl looked as she stood by my side on that wide platform! How strangely that air of repose, that sweet refined calm face, that general appearance of indifference, contrasted with the busy scene around us, as the train disgorged its contents. Oh, that I could sweep the clouds from her mind and make her what I wished!

I had found some difficulty in settling what course to pursue. I decided, after ventilating various schemes, that I would take Pauline to my own rooms in Walpole street. I knew the people of the house well, and felt certain she would be taken care of during my absence, for, after a few hours' repose, it was my intention to start in search of Ceneri. I had written from Edinburgh to Walpole street, telling the good people there to be ready for me and whom to expect; moreover, I had again appealed to my faithful old servant Priscilla and begged her to be at the house awaiting my arrival. For my sake, I knew she would show every kindness to my poor girl. So to Walpole street we went.

All was in readiness for us. Priscilla received us with eyes full of curious wonder. I saw that her sympathies were at once enlisted by Pauline's appearance. After a cup of tea and something to eat, I begged Priscilla to lead my wife to her room, that she might take the rest she needed. Pauline, in her childlike, docile way, rose and followed the old woman.

"When you have seen to Mrs. Vaughan's comforts, come back to me," I said, "I want to speak to you."

Priscilla, no doubt, was only too eager to return to me. I felt she was brimming over with questions about my unexpected marriage; but I checked her volubility. My face must have told her that I had nothing pleasant to communicate. She sat down, and, as I desired her to do, listened without comment to my tale.

I was compelled to confide in some one. The old woman, I knew, was trustworthy and would keep my affairs secret. So I told her all, or nearly all. I explained as well as I could Pauline's peculiar mental state. I suggested all that my short experience brought to my mind, and I prayed Priscilla, by the love she bore me, to guard and be kind in my absence to the wife I loved. The promise being given I threw myself upon the sofa and slept for several hours.

In the afternoon I saw Pauline again. I asked her if she knew where I could write to Ceneri. She shook her head.

"Try and think, my dear," I said.

She pressed her delicate finger tips against her brow. I had always noticed that trying to think always troubled her greatly.

"Teresa knew," I said to assist her.

"Yes, ask her."

"But she has left us, Pauline. Can you tell us where she is?"

Once more she shook her head hopelessly.

"He told me he lived in Geneva," I said. "Do you know the street?"

She turned her puzzled eyes to mine. I sighed, as I knew my questions were useless.

Still, find him I must. I would go to Geneva. If the man was a doctor, as he represented himself, he must be known there. If I could not find any trace of him at Geneva I would try Turin. I took my wife's hand.

"I am going away for a few days, Pauline. You will stay here until I return. Every one will be kind to you. Priscilla will get you all you want."

"Yes, Gilbert," she said softly. I had taught her to call me Gilbert.

Then, after some last instructions to Priscilla, I started on my journey. As my cab drove from the door I glanced up at the window of the room in which I had left Pauline. She was standing there looking at me, and a great wave of joy came over my heart, for I fancied that her eyes were looking sad, like the eyes of one taking leave of a dear friend. It may have been only fancy, but, as I had never before even fancied the expression there, that look in Pauline's eyes was some comfort to carry away with me.

And now for Geneva and il dottore Ceneri!

CHAPTER VI.

UNSATISFACTORY ANSWERS.

I TRAVELED in hot haste, as fast as steam would bear me, to Geneva; where I at once began my inquiries as to the whereabouts of Doctor Ceneri. I had hoped that finding him would be an easy matter. His words had given me the impression that he practiced in the town. If so, many people must know him. But he had misled me or I had deceived myself. For several days I hunted high and low; inquired everywhere; but not a soul could I find who knew the man. I called on every doctor in the place; one and all professed entire ignorance of such a colleague. At last I felt certain that the name he had given me was a fictitious one, or that Geneva was not his abode. However obscure a doctor may be, he is sure to be known by some of his professional brethren in the same town. I decided to go to Turin and try my luck there.

It was on the eve of my intended departure. I was strolling about, feeling very sad at heart, and trying to persuade myself that I should fare better in Turin, when I noticed a man lounging along the opposite side of the street. As his face and bearing seemed familiar to me, I crossed the road to see him to better advantage. Being clothed in the inevitable tourist suit he presented the appearance of an ordinary British traveler—so much so that I believed I must be mistaken. But I was right after all. In spite of his changed attire I recognized him the moment I drew near. He was the man with whom Kenyon had engaged in a wordy war outside San Giovanni—the man who had remonstrated with us for our expressed admiration of Pauline—the man who had walked away arm-in-arm with Ceneri.

The chance was too good a one to be lost. He would, at least, know where the doctor was to be found. I trusted his memory for faces was not so retentive as mine; that he would not connect me with the unpleasant passage which occurred when we last met. I walked up to him, and raising my hat, requested him to favor me with a few moments' conversation.

I spoke in English. He gave me a quick, penetrating glance, then acknowledging my salutation, professed, in the same language, his wish to place himself at my service.

"I am trying to ascertain the address of a gentleman who I believe lives here. I think you will be able to assist me."

He laughed. "I will if I can—but being like yourself an Englishman, and knowing very few people, I fear I can be of little help to you."

"I am anxious to find a doctor named Ceneri."

The start he gave as he heard my words; the look, almost of apprehension, he cast on me, showed me that he recognized the name. But in a second he recovered himself.

"I cannot remember the name. I am sorry to say I am unable to help you."

"But," I said in Italian, "I have seen you in his company."

He scowled viciously. "I know no man of the name. Good-morning."

He raised his hat and strode away.

I was not going to lose him like that. I quickened my pace and came up with him.

"I must beg of you to tell me where I can find him. I must see him upon an important matter. It is no use denying that he is a friend of yours."

He hesitated, then halted. "You are strangely importunate, sir. Perhaps you will tell me your reason for your statement that the man you seek is my friend?"

"I saw you arm-in-arm with him."

"Where, may I ask?"

"In Turin—last spring. Outside San Giovanni."

He looked at me attentively. "Yes, I remember your face now. You are one of those young men who insulted a lady, and whom I swore to chastise."

"No insult was meant, but even had it been so, it might be passed over now."

"No insult! I have killed a man for less than your friend said to me!"

"Please remember I said nothing. But that matters little. It is on behalf of his niece, Pauline, that I wish to see Dr. Ceneri."

A look of utter astonishment spread over his face. "What have you to do with his niece?" he asked roughly.

"That is his business and mine. Now tell me where I can find him."

"What is your name?" he asked curtly.

"Gilbert Vaughan."

"What are you?"

"An English gentleman—nothing more."

He remained thoughtful for a few seconds. "I can take you to Ceneri," he said, but first I must know what you want with him, and why you mention Pauline's name? The street is not the place to talk in—let us go elsewhere."

I led him to my hotel, to a room where we could talk at our ease.

"Now, Mr. Vaughan," he said, "answer my question, and I may see my way to helping you. What has Pauline March to do with the matter?"

"She is my wife—that is all."

He sprang to his feet—a fierce Italian oath hissed from his lips. His face was white with rage.

"Your wife!" he shouted. "You lie—I say you lie!"

I rose, furious as himself, but more collected.

"I told you, sir, that I was an English gentleman. Either you will apologize for your words or I will kick you out of the room."

He struggled with his passion and curbed it. "I apologize," he said, "I was wrong. Does Ceneri know it?" he asked sharply.

"Certainly; he was present when we were married."

His passion once more seemed upon the point of mastering him. "*Traditore!*" I heard him whisper fiercely to himself. "*Ingannatore!*" Then he turned to me with composed features.

"If so, I have nothing more to do save to congratulate you, Mr. Vaughan. Your fortune is indeed enviable. Your wife is beautiful, and of course good. You will find her a charming companion."

I would have given much to know why the mention of my marriage should have sent him into such a storm of rage, but I would have given more to have been able to fulfill my threat of kicking him out. The intonation of his last words told me that Pauline's state of mind was well known to him. I could scarcely keep my hands off the fellow; but I was compelled to restrain my anger, as without his aid I could not find Ceneri.

"Thank you," I said quietly, "now perhaps you will give me the information I want."

"You are not a very devoted bridegroom, Mr. Vaughan," said the fellow mockingly. "If Ceneri was at your wedding it could only have occurred a few days ago. It must be important business which tears you from the side of your bride."

"It is important business."

"Then I fear it must wait a few days. Ceneri is not in Geneva. But I have reason to think he may be here in about a week's time. I shall see him, and will tell him you are here."

"Let me know where to find him and I will call upon him. I must speak with him."

"I imagine that will be as the doctor chooses. I can only make known your wishes to him."

He bowed and left me. I felt that even now it was doubtful whether I should succeed in obtaining the interview with the mysterious doctor. It depended entirely whether he chose to grant it. He might come to Geneva and go away again without my being any the wiser, unless his friend or himself sent me some communication.

I idled away a week, and then began to fear that Ceneri had made up his mind to keep out of my way. But it was not so. A letter came one morning. It contained a few words only. "You wish to see me. A carriage will call for you at eleven o'clock. M. C."

At eleven o'clock an ordinary hired conveyance drove up to the hotel. The driver inquired for Mr. Vaughan. I stepped in without a word, and was driven to a small house outside the town. Upon being shown into a room I found the doctor seated at a table covered with newspapers and letters. He rose, and shaking my hand, begged me to be seated.

"You have come to Geneva to see me, I hear, Mr. Vaughan?"

"Yes. I wished to ask you some questions respecting my wife."

"I will answer all I can—but there are many I shall doubtless refuse to reply to. You remember my stipulation?"

"Yes, but why did you not make me aware of my wife's peculiar mental state?"

"You had seen her yourself several times. Her state was the same as when she first proved so attractive to you. I am sorry you should think yourself deceived."

"Why not have told me everything? Then I could have blamed no one."

"I had so many reasons, Mr. Vaughan. Pauline was a great responsibility on my shoulders. A great expense, for I am a poor man. And, after all, is the matter so very bad? She is beautiful, good and amiable. She will make you a loving wife."

"You wished to get rid of her, in fact."

"Scarcely that altogether. There are circumstances —I cannot explain them—which made me glad to marry her to an Englishman of good position."

"Without thinking what that man's feelings might be on finding the woman he loved little better than a child."

I felt indignant, and showed my feeling very plainly. Ceneri took little notice of my warmth. He remained perfectly calm.

"There is another point to be considered. Pauline's case is, in my opinion, far from being hopeless. Indeed, I have always looked upon marriage as greatly adding to the chance of her recovery. If her mind to a certain extent is wanting, I believe that, little by little, it may be built up again. Or it may return as suddenly as it left her."

My heart leaped at his words of hope. Cruelly as I felt I had been treated, tool that I had been made for this man's selfish ends, I was willing to accept the situation cheerfully if I had any hope held out to me.

"Will you give me all the particulars of my poor wife's state? I conclude she has not been always like this."

"Certainly not. Her case is most peculiar. Some years ago she received a great shock—sustained a sudden loss. The effect was to entirely blot out the past from her mind. She rose from her bed after some weeks' illness with her memory a complete blank Places were forgotten—friends were strangers to her Her mind might, as you say, have been the mind of a child. But a child's mind grows, and, if treated properly, so will hers."

"What was the cause of her illness—what shock?"

"That is one of the questions I cannot answer."

"But I have a right to know."

"You have a right to ask, and I have a right to refuse to speak."

"Tell me of her family—her relatives."

"She has none, I believe, save myself."

I asked other questions, but could get no answers worth recording. I should return to England not much wiser than I left it. But there was one question to which I insisted on having a clear reply.

"What has that friend of yours—that English-speaking Italian, to do with Pauline?"

Ceneri shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Macari! I am glad to be able to answer something fully, Mr. Vaughan. For a year or two before Pauline was taken ill, Macari supposed himself to be in love with her. He is now furious with me for allowing her to get married. He declares he was only awaiting her recovery to try his own luck."

"Why should he not have served your purpose as well as I seem to have?"

Ceneri looked at me sharply. "Do you regret, Mr. Vaughan?"

"No—not if there is a chance, even a slight chance. But I tell you, Dr. Ceneri, you have deceived and cajoled me shamefully."

I rose to take my leave. Then Ceneri spoke with more feeling than he had as yet displayed.

"Mr. Vaughan, do not judge me too harshly. I have wronged you, I admit. There are things you know nothing of. I must tell you more than I intended. The temptation to place Pauline in a position of wealth and comfort was irresistible. I am her debtor for a vast amount. At one time her fortune was about fifty thousand pounds. The whole of that I spent—"

"And dare to boast of it!" I said, bitterly. He waved his hand with dignity.

"Yes. I dare to speak of it. I spent it all for freedom—for Italy. It was in my keeping as trustee. I, who would have robbed my own father, my own son, should I hesitate to take her money for such an end? Every farthing went to the great cause, and was well spent."

"It was the act of a criminal to rob an orphan.'

"Call it what you like. Money had to be found. Why should I not sacrifice my honor for my country as freely as I would have sacrificed my life?"

"It is no use discussing it—the matter is ended."

"Yes, but I tell you to show you why I wished to gain Pauline a home. Moreover, Mr. Vaughan"—here here his voice dropped to a whisper—"I was anxious to provide that home at once. I am bound on a journey—a journey of which I cannot see the end, much less the returning. I doubt whether I should have decided to see you had it not been for this. But the chances are we shall never meet again."

"You mean you are engaged in some plot or conspiracy?"

"I mean what I have said—no more, no less. I wil now bid you adieu."

Angry as I was with the man, I could not refuse the hand he stretched out to me.

"Farewell," he said, "it may be that in some year or two I shall write to you and ask you if my predictions as to Pauline's recovery have been fulfilled; but do not trouble to seek me or to inquire for me if I am silent."

So we parted. The carriage was waiting to take me back to the hotel. On my way thither I passed the man whom Ceneri had called Macari. He signalled to the driver to stop, and then entering the carriage sat beside me.

"You have seen the doctor, Mr. Vaughan?" he asked.

"Yes. I have just come from him."

'And have learned all you wish to know, I hope?"

"A great many of my questions have been answered."

"But not all. Ceneri would not answer all."

He laughed, and his laugh was cynical and mocking. I kept silence.

"Had you questioned me," he continued, "I might have told you more than Ceneri."

"I came to ask Dr. Ceneri for all the information he could give me respecting my wife's mental state, of which I believe you are aware. If you can say any thing that may be of use to me, I will beg you to speak."

"You asked him what caused it?"

"I did. He told me a shock."

"You asked him what shock. That he did not tell you?"

"He had his reasons for declining, I suppose."

"Yes. Excellent reasons—family reasons."

"If you can enlighten me, kindly do so."

"Not here, Mr. Vaughan. The doctor and I are friends. You might fly back and assault him, and I should get blamed. You are going back to England, I suppose?"

"Yes. I start at once.'

"Give me your address, and perhaps I will write; or, better still, if I feel inclined to be communicative, I will call on you when I am next in London, and pay my respects to Mrs. Vaughan at the same time."

So eager was I to get at the bottom of the affair that I gave him my card. He then stopped the carriage and stepped out. He raised his hat, and there was a malicious triumph in his eyes as they met mine.

"Good-by, Mr. Vaughan. Perhaps after all you are to be congratulated upon being married to a woman whose past it is impossible to rake up."

With this parting shaft—a shaft which struck deep and rankled—he left me. It was well he did so, before I caught him by the throat and strove to force him to explain his last words.

Longing to see my poor wife again, I went back to England with all speed.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAIMING RELATIONSHIP.

YES, she was glad to see me back! In her uncertain clouded way she welcomed me. My great fear, that in the short time she would have entirely forgotten me was groundless. She knew me and welcomed me. My poor Pauline! If I could but find the way to bring those truant senses back once more!

For months and months nothing of importance occurred. If my love's mind was, as Ceneri predicted, to be gradually restored, the process was a tedious one. At times I thought her better—at times worse. The fact is there was little or no change in her condition. Hour after hour she sits in her apathy and listlessness; speaking only when spoken to; but willing to come with me anywhere; do anything I suggest, whenever, alas! I express my wish in words she can comprehend. Poor Pauline!

The greatest doctors in England have seen her. Each says the same thing. She may recover; but each tells me the recovery would be made more possible if the exact circumstances which brought about the calamity were known. These I doubt if we shall ever learn.

For Ceneri has made no sign, nor has Macari sent his promised information. The latter, after his last malicious words, I dread more than I wish for. Teresa, who might have thrown some light on the subject, has disappeared. I blame myself for not having asked the doctor where she was to be found; but doubtless he would have declined to tell me. So the days go on. All I can do is, with Priscilla's assistance, to insure that my poor girl is made as happy as can be, and hope that time and care may at length restore her.

We are still at Walpole street. My intention had been to buy a house and furnish it. But why? Pauline could not look after it—would not be interested in it—it would not be home. So we stay at my old lodgings and I live almost the life of a hermit.

I care to see no friends. I am, indeed, blamed for forsaking all my old acquaintances. Some who have seen Pauline attribute my lack of hospitality to jealousy; some to other causes; but, as yet, I believe no one knows the truth.

There are times when I feel I cannot bear my grief—times when I wish that Kenyon had never led me inside that church at Turin: but there are other times when I feel that, in spite of all, my love for my wife, hopeless as it is, has made me a better and even a happier man. I can sit for hours looking at her lovely face, even as I could looking at a picture or a statue. I try to imagine that face lit up with bright intelligence, as once it must have been. I long to know what can have drawn that dark curtain over her mind, and I pray that one day it may fall aside and I may see her eyes responsive to my own. If I felt sure this would ever be I would wait without a murmur, if needs be, till our hair has grown gray.

I have this poor consolation—whatever the effect of our marriage may have been upon my life, it has, at least, not made my wife's lot a sadder one. Her days I am sure must be brighter than those when she was under the supervision of that terrible old Italian woman. Priscilla loves her and pets her like a child, whilst I—well, I do everything I can which I fancy may give her such pleasure as she is capable of feeling. Sometimes, not always, she seems to appreciate my efforts, and once or twice she has taken my hand and raised it to her lips as if in gratitude. She is beginning to love me as a child may love its father, as some weak helpless creature may love its protector. This is a poor recompense, but I am thankful even for this.

So, in our quiet household, the days pass by and the months glide away until the winter is over and the laburnums and lilacs in the little plots in front of houses in the suburbs are in bud.

It is fortunate that I am fond of books. Without that taste life would indeed be colorless. I have not the heart to leave Pauline alone and seek society on my own account. I spend many hours every day reading and studying, whilst my wife sits in the same room silent unless I address a remark to her.

It is a matter of great grief to me that I am almost entirely debarred from hearing the sound of music. I soon discovered that its effect upon Pauline was prejudicial. The notes which soothed me, in some way seemed to irritate her and make her uneasy. So, unless she is out somewhere with old Priscilla and I am left alone, the piano is unopened; the music books lie unused. Only those who love music as I love it can understand how great a deprivation this is to me.

One morning as I sat alone I was told that a gentleman wished to see me. He gave the servant no name, but instructed her to say that he was from Geneva. I knew it must be Macari. My first impulse was to send back word that I would not see him. Again and again, since our last meeting, his words had come back to me —words which hinted at something in Pauline's past which her uncle had an object in concealing. But each time I thought of them I decided they were only the malicious insinuation of a disappointed man, who having failed to win the woman he loved, wished to make his favored rival suspicious and unhappy. I feared nothing he could say against my wife, but disliking the man, I hesitated before giving instructions for his admittance.

Yet Macari was the only link between Pauline and her past; Ceneri I felt sure I should never see again; this man was the only one remaining from whom it was possible to learn anything respecting my wife. The one person whose appearance could, by any chance, stimulate that torpid memory, and perhaps, influence the state of her mind by suggesting, no matter how dimly, scenes and events in which he must have played a part. So thinking, I decided that the man should be admitted, and moreover, that he should be brought face to face with Pauline. If he wished to do so he might speak to her of old days, even old passion—any thing that might aid her to pick up and retrace those dropped threads of memory.

He entered my room and greeted me with what I knew to be assumed cordiality. I felt, in spite of the hearty grasp he gave my hand, that he meant his visit to bode no good to me. What did I care why he came? I wanted him for a purpose. With the end in view, what mattered the tool, if I could keep it from turning in my hand and wounding me—and this was to be seen.

I met him with a greeting almost as cordial as his own; I begged him to be seated, then rang for wine and cigars.

"You see I have keep my promise, Mr. Vaughan," he said, with a smile.

"Yes, I trusted you would do so. Have you been long in England?"

"Only a couple of days."

"How long do you stay?"

"Until I am called abroad again. Things have gone wrong with us there. I must wait until the atmosphere has quieted down."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"I fancied you knew my trade," he said.

"I suppose you are a conspirator—I don't use the word offensively; it is the only one I can think of."

"Yes. Conspirator—regenerator—apostle of freedom, whatever you like."

"But your country has been free for some years."

"Other countries are not free. I work for them. Our poor friend Ceneri did the same, but his last day's work is done."

"Is he dead?" I asked, startled.

"Dead to all of us. I cannot give you particulars but a few weeks after you left Geneva he was arrested in St. Petersburgh. He lay in prison for months awaiting his trial. It has come off, I hear."

"Well, what has happened to him?"

"What always happens—our poor friend is at this moment on his way to Siberia, condemned to twenty years' hard labor in the mines."

Although I bore no particular love towards Ceneri, I shuddered as I heard his fate.

"And you escaped?" I said.

"Naturally, or I should not be here smoking your very good cigars and sipping your capital claret."

I was disgusted at the indifference with which he spoke of his friend's misfortune. If it seemed horrible to me to think of the man working in the Siberian mines, what should it have seemed to his fellow conspirator?

"Now, Mr. Vaughan," said the latter, "with your permission I will enter on business matters with you I am afraid I shall surprise you."

"Let me hear what you have to-say."

"First of all I must ask you what Ceneri told you about myself?"

"He told me your name."

"Nothing of my family? He did not tell you my true name any more than he told you his own? He did not tell you it was March, and that Pauline and I are brother and sister?

I was astonished at this announcement. In the face of the doctor's assertion that this man had been in love with Pauline, I did not for a moment believe it; but thinking it better to hear his tale out, I simply replied, "He did not."

"Very well—then I will tell you my history as briefly as I can. I am known by many names abroad, but my right name is Anthony March. My father and Pauline's married Dr. Ceneri's sister. He died young and left the whole of his large property to his wife absolutely. She died some time afterwards, and in turn left every thing in my uncle's hands as sole trustee for my sister and myself. You know what became of the money, Mr. Vaughan?"

"Dr. Ceneri told me," I said, impressed in spite of myself by the correct way in which he marshalled his facts.

"Yes, it was spent for Italy. It paid for the keep of many a red shirt, armed many a true Italian. All our fortune was spent by the trustee. I have never blamed him. When I knew where it had gone I freely forgave him."

"Let us say no more about it, then."

"I don't quite look upon it in that light. Victor Emmanuel's government is now firmly established. Italy is free and will grow richer every year. Now, Mr. Vaughan, my idea is this. I believe, if the facts of the case were laid before the king, something might be done. I believe, if I, and you on behalf of your wife, were to make it known that Ceneri's appropriation of our fortunes for patriotic purposes had left us penniless, a large portion of the money, if not all, would be freely returned to us. You must have friends in England who would assist you in gaining the ear of King Victor. I have friends in Italy. Garibaldi, for instance, would vouch for the amount paid into his hands by Dr. Ceneri."

His tale was plausible, and, after all, his scheme was not altogether visionary.

I was beginning to think he might really be my wife's brother, and that Ceneri had, for some purpose of his own, concealed the relationship.

"But I have plenty of money," I said.

"But I have not," he replied, with a frank laugh "I think you ought for the sake of your wife to join me in the matter."

"I must take time to consider it."

"Certainly—I am in no hurry. I will in the mean time get my papers and petition in order. And now may I see my sister?"

"She will be in very shortly if you will wait."

"Is she better, Mr. Vaughan?" I shook my head sadly.

"Poor girl! then I fear she will not recognize me. We have spent very few days together since we were children. I am of course much her senior; and from the age of eighteen have been plotting and fighting. Domestic ties are forgotten under such circumstances."

I was still far from putting any faith in the man besides, there were his words on a former occasion to be accounted for.

"Mr. Macari," I said.

"Excuse me—March is my name."

"Then, Mr. March, I must ask you now to tell me the particulars of the shock which deprived my wife of her full reason."

His face grew grave. "I cannot now. Some day I will do so."

"You will then, at least, explain your words when we parted at Geneva?"

"I will ask pardon for them and apologize, as I know I spoke hastily and thoughtlessly, but having forgotten, I am, of course, unable to explain them."

I said nothing, feeling uncertain whether he was playing a deep game with me or not.

"I know," he continued, "that I was furious at the hearing of Pauline's marriage. In her state of health Ceneri should never have allowed it—and then, Mr. Vaughan, I had set my heart upon her marrying an Italian. Had she recovered, my dream was that her beauty would win her a husband of the highest rank."

Any reply I should have made was prevented by the entrance of Pauline. I was intensely anxious to see what effect the appearance of her so-called brother would have upon her.

Macari rose and stepped towards her. "Pauline," he said, "do you remember me?"

She looked at him with eyes full of curious wonder, but shook her head as one in doubt. He took her hand. I noticed that she seemed to shrink from him instinctively.

"Poor girl, poor girl!" he said. "This is worse than I expected, Mr. Vaughan. Pauline, it is long since we have met, but you cannot have forgotten me!"

Her large troubled eyes were riveted on his face, but she made no sign of recognition.

"Try and think who it is, Pauline," I said.

She passed her hand across her forehead, then once more shook her head. "*Non me ricordo*," she murmured; then, as if the mental effort had exhausted her, sank, with a weary sigh, upon a chair.

I was delighted to hear her speak in Italian. It was a tongue she seldom used unless compelled to do so. That she employed it now showed me she must, in some dim way, connect the visitor with Italy. It was to me a new gleam of hope.

There was another thing I noticed. I have said how seldom it was that Pauline raised her eyes to any one's face; but to-day, during the whole time Macari was in the room, she never looked away from him. He sat near her, and after a few more words to her, addressed his remarks exclusively to me. All the while I could see my wife watching him with an eager, troubled look; several times, indeed, I almost persuaded myself that there was an expression of fear in her eyes. Let them express fear, hate, trouble, even love, so long as I could see the dawn of returning reason in them! I began to think that if Pauline was to be restored, it would be through my visitor.

So when he took his leave I pressed him, with no assumed manner, to call again very soon—to-morrow, if possible. He readily promised to do so, and we parted for the day.

I can only hope he was as satisfied with the result of our interview as I was.

After his departure, Pauline fell into a restless state. Several times I saw her pressing her hand to her forehead. She seemed unable to sit still. Now and again she went to the window and looked up and down the street. I paid no attention to her actions, although once or twice I saw her turn her eyes towards me with a piteous, imploring glance. I believed that something—some old memory in connection with Macari—was striving to force itself to her clouded brain, and I looked forward with impatience to to-morrow, when he would pay us another visit. The man had something to get out of me, so I felt certain I should see him again.

He came the next day, and the next, and many other days. It was clear he was determined to ingratiate me, if possible. He did all he could to make himself agreeable, and I must say he was, under the present circumstances, very good company. He knew, or professed to know, all the ins and outs of every plot or political event of the last ten years, and was full of original anecdotes and stirring experiences. He had fought under Garibaldi through the whole of the Italian campaign. He had known the interior of prisons, and some of hi escapes from death had been marvellous. I had no reason to doubt the truth of his tales, although I mistrusted the man himself. Let his smile be as pleasant as he could make it—let his laugh ring naturally—I could not forget the expression I had seen on that face, or his manner and words on former occasions.

I took care that Pauline should always be with us. It was the only wish of mine the poor child had ever shown even a mute disinclination to comply with. She never spoke in Macari's presence, but her eyes were scarcely ever turned from him. He seemed to have a kind of fascination for her. When he entered the room

I could hear her sigh, and when he left it she breathed a breath of relief; and every day she grew more restless, uneasy and, I knew, unhappy. My heart smote me as I guessed I was causing her pain; but, at all cost I determined to persevere. I felt that the crisis of her life was fast drawing near.

One evening, after dinner, as Macari and I sat over our claret, and Pauline, with her troubled eyes fixed, as usual, on my guest, was reclining on the sofa a little way off, he began to relate some of his military adventures. How once, when in imminent peril—his right arm broken and useless at his side, his left arm not strong enough to wield the rifle with the bayonet fixed—he had taken the bayonet off, and holding it in his left hand, had driven it through the heart of an antagonist. As he described the deed, he suited the gesture to the word, and seizing a knife which lay on the table, dealt a downwards blow through the air at an imaginary white-coated Austrian.

I heard a deep sigh behind me, and, turning, I saw Pauline lying with her eyes closed and apparently in a dead faint. I ran to her, raised her up, and carrying her to her room, laid her on her bed. It was now about nine o'clock. Priscilla happened to be out, so I ran back to the dining-room and bade Macari a hasty good-night.

"I hope there is not much the matter," he said.

"No; only a fainting fit. Your fierce gesture must have frightened her."

Then I returned to my wife's bedside, and began the usual course of restoratives. Yet without success. White as a statue she lay there, her soft breathing and the faint throb of her pulse only telling that she was alive. She lay there without sense or motion, whilst I chafed her hands, bathed her brow, and endeavored to recall her to life. Even whilst doing so my heart was beating wildly. I felt that the moment had come; that something had brought back the past to her, and that the fierce rush with which it came had overpowered her. I could scarcely dare to put my wild belief into words, but it was that when Pauline again opened her eyes they would shine with light which I had never known in them—the light of perfectly restored intelligence. A wild, mad idea, but one I had the fullest faith in.

So it was that I did not send for a doctor: that after a while I gave up my own attempts to awaken consciousness; that I resolved to let her lie in that calm, senseless state until she awoke of her own accord. I took her wrist between my fingers that I might feel every beat of her pulse. I laid my cheek against hers that I might catch the sound of every breath—and thus I waited until Pauline should awake, and as I fondly believed, awake in her right mind.

She remained in this state for at least an hour. So long that at last I began to get frightened, and think I must, after all, send for medical aid. Just as I was forming the resolution to do so, I noticed the beats of her pulse grow stronger and more rapid; I felt her breath drawn deeper; I saw a look of returning life steal over her face; and, in breathless impatience, I waited.

And then Pauline—my wife—came back to life—she rose in the bed and turned her face to mine; and in her eyes I saw what, by the mercy of God, I shall never again see there!

CHAPTER VIII.

CALLED BACK.

I WRITE this chapter with great reluctance. If I could make my tale connected and complete without it, I should prefer to say nothing about the events it records. If some of my experiences have been strange ones, all save these can be explained; but these never will, never can be explained to my satisfaction.

Pauline awoke, and as I saw her eyes, I shuddered as if a freezing wind had passed over me. It was not madness I saw in them, neither was it sense. They were dilated to the utmost extent; they were fixed and immovable, yet I knew they saw absolutely nothing; that their nerves conveyed no impression to the brain. All my wild hopes that reason would return at the expiration of her fainting fit, were at an end. It was clear that she had passed into a state far more pitiable than her former one.

I spoke to her; called her by name; but she took no notice of my words. She seemed to be unaware of my presence. She looked ever, with strange fixed eyes, in one direction.

Suddenly she rose, and, before I could interpose to prevent her, passed out of the room. I followed her. She went swiftly down the stairs, and I saw she was making for the front door. Her hand was on the latch when I came up to her and again called her by name; entreating, even commanding her to return. No sound of my voice seemed to reach her ears. In her critical state, for so I felt it to be, I shrank from restraining her by force, thinking it would be better to leave her free to go as she listed; of course accompanying her to guard her against evil.

I caught up my hat and a large cloak, both of which were hanging in the hall; the latter I wrapped around her as she walked, and managed to draw the hood over her head. She made no resistance to this, but she let me do it without a word to show that she noticed the action. Then, with me at her side, she walked straight on.

She went at a swift but uniform pace, as one who had a certain destination in view. She turned her eyes neither to the left nor to the right—neither up nor down. Not once during that walk did I see them move, not once did I see an eyelid quiver. Although my sleeve was touching hers, I am certain she had no thought or knowledge of my presence.

I made no further attempt to check her progress. She was not wandering about in an aimless manner. Something, I knew not what, was guiding or impelling her steps to some set purpose. Something in her disordered brain was urging her to reach some spot as quickly as possible. I dreaded the consequences of restraining her from so doing. Even if it was but an exaggerated case of sleep walking it would be unwise to wake her. Far better to follow her until the fit ended.

She passed out of Walpole street, and, without a moment's hesitation, turned at right angles and went along the straight broad road. Along this road for more than half a mile she led me, then, turning sharply round, walked half way through another street; then she stopped before a house.

An ordinary three story house of the usual London type. A house differing very little from my own and thousands of others, except that, by the light of the street lamp, I could see it looked ill-cared for and neglected. The window panes were dusty, and in one of them was a bill stating that this desirable residence was to let, furnished.

I marvelled as to what strange freak of mind could have led Pauline to this untenanted house. Had any one she had known in former days lived here? If so, it was, perhaps, a hopeful sign that some awakened memory had induced her to direct her unwitting steps to a place associated with her earlier days. Very anxious, and even much excited, I waited to see what course she would now take.

She went straight up to the door and laid her hand upon it, as though she expected it would yield to her touch. Then, for the first time, she seemed to hesitate, and grow troubled.

"Pauline, dearest," I said, "let us go back now. It is dark and too late to go in there to-night. To-morrow, if you like, we will come again."

She answered not. She stood before that door with her hand pressing against it. I took her arm, and tried gently to lead her away. She resisted with a passive strength I should not have believed she possessed. Whatever was the dimly conceived object in my poor wife's brain, it was plain to me it could only be attained by passing through that door.

I was quite willing to humor her. Having come so far, I feared to retreat. To cross her wishes in the present state of things I felt might be fatal. But how could we gain entrance?

There was no gleam of light upstairs or downstairs. As you looked at the house you knew intuitively it was uninhabited. The agent whose name appeared on the bill carried on business a mile away, and, even if I had ventured to leave Pauline and go in search of him, at this time of night my expedition would be fruitless.

As I cast around, wondering what was the best thing to do—whether to fetch a cab and carry my poor girl into it, or whether to let her wait here until she recognized the impossibility of entering the house, and, at last growing weary, choose to return home of her own accord—as I debated these alternatives a sudden thought struck me. Once before my latchkey had opened a strange door, it was within the bounds of possibility it might do so again. I knew that uninhabited houses are often from carelessness or convenience left with the doors only latched. It was an absurd idea, but, after all, there was no harm in trying. I drew out my key, a duplicate of that used on another occasion. I placed it in the keyhole without a hope of success, and, as I felt the lock turn and saw the door yield, a thrill of something like horror ran through me, for now that it had come to pass I knew this thing could be no mere coincidence.

As the door opened, Pauline without a word, without a gesture of surprise, without anything that showed she was more aware of my presence than before, passed me and entered first. I followed her, and closing the door behind me, found myself in perfect darkness. I heard her light quick step in front of me; I heard her ascending the stairs; I heard a door open, and then, and only then, I summoned up presence of mind enough to force my limbs to bear me in pursuit—and my blood seemed to be iced water, my flesh was creeping, my hair was bristling up, as, still in darkness, I crossed the hall and found the staircase without difficulty.

Why should I not find it, dark, pitch dark as it was? I knew the road to it well! Once before I had reached it in darkness, and many times besides, in dreams, had I crossed that space! Like a sudden revelation the truth came to me. It came to me as the key turned in the lock. I was in that very house into which I had strayed three years ago. I was crossing the very hall, ascending the same stairs, and should stand in the identical room which had been the scene of that terrible unexpiated crime. I should see with restored sight the spot where, blind and helpless, I had nearly fallen a victim to my rashness. But Pauline, what brought her here?

Yes, as I expected! as, in fact, I felt certain! The stairs the same and the lintel of the door in the exact place it should be. I might be re-acting the events of that fearful night, complete even to the darkness. For a moment I wondered whether the last three years were not the dream; whether I was not blind now; whether there was such a being as my wife? But I threw the fancy aside.

Where was Pauline? Recalled to myself I realized the necessity of light. Drawing my match box from my pocket I struck a vesta, and by its light I entered the room which once before I had entered with little hope of ever leaving.

My first thought, my first glance, was for Pauline. She was there, standing erect in the apartment, with both hands pressed to her brow. The expression of her face and eyes was little changed; it was easy to see she comprehended nothing as yet. But I felt that something was struggling within her, and I dreaded the moment when it should take coherence and form. I dreaded it for her and I dreaded it for myself. What awful passages would it reveal to me?

The wax light burned down to my fingers, and I was compelled to drop it. I struck another, then looked about for some means of making the illumination sustained. To my great joy I found a half burned candle in a candlestick on the mantlepiece. I blew the thick dust out of the cup formed by the melted wax at the bottom of the wick, and after a little spluttering and resistance, managed to induce it to remain lighted.

Pauline stood always in the same attitude, but I fancied her breath was quickening. Her fingers were playing convulsively round her temples, fidgeting and pushing her thick hair back, striving, it seemed to me, to conjure thought to return to that empty shrine. I could do nothing but wait; and whilst I waited I glanced around me.

We were in a good-sized room, substantially but not fashionably furnished; the style altogether was that of an ordinary lodging house. It was clear it had not been occupied for some time, as dust lay thick on every article. I could throw my mind back and recall the very corner of the room in which I was stationed whilst the assassins were so busily engaged. I could mark the spot where I fell upon the yet quivering body, and I shuddered as I could not resist peering on the floor for traces of the crime. But if the carpet was the same one, it was of a dark red hue and kept its secret well. At one end of the room were folding doors—it must have been from behind these I heard those haunting sounds of distress. I threw them open, and holding my candle on high, looked in. The room was of much the same kind as the other one, but, as I fully expected, it contained a piano—the very piano, perhaps, whose notes had merged into that cry of horror.

What possessed me! What impulse urged me! I shall never know. I laid down the candle ; I entered the back room ; I lifted the dust-covered lid of the piano and I struck a few notes. Doubtless it was the tragical associations of the scene which made me, without thinking why or wherefore, blend together the notes which commenced that great song which I had heard as I lingered outside the door, listening to the sweet voice singing, and wondering whose voice it was. As I struck those notes I looked through the folding door at the motionless statue-like figure of Pauline.

A nervous trembling seemed to pass over her frame. She turned and came towards me, and there was a look in her face which made me move aside from the piano, and wonder and fear what was to take place.

The cloak I had thrown around her had fallen from her shoulders. She seated herself on the music bench, and striking the keys with a master hand played brilliantly and faultlessly the prelude to the song of which I had struck a few vagrant notes.

I was thunderstruck. Never till now had she shown the slightest taste for music—as I have said, it appeared rather to annoy and irritate her. Now she was bringing out sounds which it seemed absurd to expect from that neglected and untuned piano.

But after the first few bars my astonishment ceased. As well as if I had been told, I knew what would happen—or part of it. I was even prepared, when the moment came for the voice to join the music, to hear Pauline sing as faultlessly as she was playing, yet to sing in the same subdued manner as on that fatal night. So fully prepared I was that with breathless emotion I waited until the song came to the very note at which it finished when once before I listened to it. So fully prepared that when she started wildly to her feet and uttered once more that cry of horror, my arms were round her in a moment, and I bore her to a sofa close by.

To her, as well as to me, all the occurrences of that dreadful night were being reproduced. The past had come back to Pauline—come back at the moment it left her.

What the reflux might do eventually—whether it would be a blessing or a curse—I had no time to consider. All my cares were needed by Pauline. My task was terrible! I had to hold her down by main force, to endeavor in every possible way to soothe her and prevent her cries, which rang so loudly that I feared the neighbors would be alarmed. And all the while she struggled with me, strove to repulse me and regain her feet, as certainly as if I could read her thoughts I knew that whatever happened formerly was once more before her eyes. Once more she was being held down by a strong hand, most likely on the same couch, and once more her struggles were gradually becoming feebler and her cries growing fainter. It needed only for the latter to sink at last into a repetition of that dismal moan to make the picture, so far as she was concerned, complete. The only difference was that the hands now laid upon her were loving ones.

All things up to the present situation, and all that I narrate after the termination of this chapter, I expect to be believed. I do not say that such events and coincidences are of every day occurrence. Had they been so, I should have no object in writing this tale. But I do say this, all else save this one thing I could prove to be true, if not by direct by circumstantial evidence; all else can be explained either simply or scientifically; but what follows I can only give my own word for Call it what you like, dreams, hallucination, overheated imagination—call it anything save invention—I shall not be annoyed. This is what happened.

Pauline at last lay still. Her moan had sunk into silence. She seemed once more to have lost all consciousness. My idea now was to remove her as speedily as possible from this fatal place. All sorts of strange thoughts and speculations were thronging my brain. All sorts of hopes and fears were shaking me. What would the explanation be, if ever I could get it?

My poor darling lay still and peaceful. I thought I would let her rest so for a few moments before I carried her out. I dreaded what waking her might mean. So I took her hand and held it close in mine.

The candle was on the mantel-piece behind me. It threw little or no light into the front room, the folding doors of which were only partially open—the half behind the couch on which Pauline lay being closed. It was, therefore, impossible for me from my seat beside her to look into the front room. Indeed, as I sat there my face was turned from it.

I held my wife's hand for a few seconds, and then a strange undefinable feeling crept over me—the kind of feeling sometimes experienced in a dream in which two persons appear, and the dreamer cannot be certain with which one s thoughts and acts he identifies himself. For a while I seemed to have a dual existence. Although perfectly aware that I still occupied the same seat, still held Pauline's hand in mine, I was also seated at the piano, and in some way gazed through the half-opened doors into the other room, and that room was full of light.

Light so brilliant that in a glance I could see everything the apartment contained. Each article of furniture, the pictures on the walls, the dark curtains drawn over the window at the end, the mirror over the fire place, the table in the center, on which a large lamp was burning. I could see all this, and more! For round the table were grouped four men, and the faces of two of the party were well known to me!

That man who was facing me—leaning across the table on which his hands rested, whose features seemed full of alarmed surprise, whose eyes were fixed on one object a few feet away from him—that man was Ceneri, the Italian doctor, Pauline's uncle and guardian.

That man who was near the table on Ceneri's right hand—who stood in the attitude of one ready to repel a possible attack, whose face was fierce and full of passion, whose dark eyes were blazing—that man was the English-speaking Italian, Macari, or as he now styled himself, Anthony March, Pauline's brother. He also was looking at the same object as Ceneri.

The man in the back ground—a short thick-set man with a scar on his cheek—was a stranger to me. He was looking over Ceneri's shoulder in the same direction.

And the object they all looked at was a young man who appeared to be falling out of his chair, and whose hand grasped convulsively the hilt of a dagger, the blade of which was buried in his heart, buried I knew by a blow which had been struck downwards by one standing over him.

All this I saw and realized in a second. The attitude of each actor, the whole scene surrounding was taken in by me as one takes in with a single glance the purport and meaning of a picture. Then I dropped Pauline's hand and sprang to my feet.

Where was the lighted room? Where were the figures I had seen? Where was that tragic scene which was taking place before my eyes? Vanished into thin air! The candle was burning dimly behind me, the front room was in dusk. Pauline and I were the only living creatures in the place!

It was a dream of course. Perhaps, under the circumstances, not an unnatural one. Knowing what I knew already of the crime which had taken place here feeling sure that in some way Pauline had been present when it was committed; excited by what had occurred to-night—Pauline's strange walk, her sudden bursting into song, the very song I had before heard, that song with the dreadful ending — it is no wonder that I imagined a scene like this, and taking the only persons I knew who were in any way connected with my poor wife, brought them into the life-like vision.

But given that a man may dream the same dream twice, perhaps three times, there is no record of his dreaming it as often as he willed. Yet this was my case. Again I took Pauline's hand, and again, after a few moments' waiting, I felt the same strange sensation and saw the same awful sight. Not once, not twice, but many times did this occur, until, skeptical as I was, as even I am now in such matters, I could only believe that in some mysterious way I was actually gazing on he very sight which had met the girl's eyes when memory, perhaps mercifully, fled from her, and reason was left impaired.

It was only when our hands were in contact that the scene came before me. This fact strengthened my theory. I felt then—I feel now, it is the true one. What peculiar mental or physical organization can have brought about such an effect, I am unable to say. Call it cataleptic, clairvoyant, any thing you will, but it was as I relate.

Again and again I took Pauline's hand, and as I held it looked into that brilliantly lighted room.

Like the motionless figures in a *tableau vivant*, again and again, without a change of attitude or expression, I saw Ceneri, Macari, and the man in the background looking at their victim. The appearance of the last named I studied very closely. Even with the agony of death on his face I could see he was supremely handsome. His must have been a face that women love to look upon, and even through the horror of the vision, a painful thought came to me as I wondered what might have been his relations with the girl who saw him suddenly struck down.

Who had struck him? Without a doubt Macari, who, as I said, was standing nearest to him, in the attitude of one expecting an attack. His hand might just have quitted the dagger hilt. His downward stroke had driven the blade so deeply into the heart that death and the blow were all but simultaneous. This was what Pauline saw, what perhaps she was seeing now, and what by some strange power, she was able to show me as one shows another a picture!

Ever since that night I have wondered how I found the presence of mind to sit there and repeatedly call up, by the aid of that senseless girl by my side, that phantasmagoria. It must have been the burning desire to fathom the mysteries of that long past night, the wish to learn exactly what shock had disarranged my wife's intellect, the indignation I felt at the cowardly murder, and the hope of bringing the criminals to justice, which gave me strength to produce and reproduce that scene until I was satisfied that I knew all that dumb show could tell me, until my heart smote me for letting Pauline lie so long in her present state.

Then I wrapped her cloak around her, raised her in my arms and bore her from the room, down the stairs to the door. The hour was not late; I soon, by the aid of a passer-by, summoned a cab, and in a very short time reached home, and laid her, still insensible, upon her bed.

Whatever strange power she had possessed of communicating her thoughts to me, it ceased as soon as we were outside that fatal house. Now and hereafter I could hold her hand, but no dream, vision or hallucination followed the act.

This is the one thing I cannot explain—the mystery at which I hinted when I commenced my tale. I have related what happened; if my bare word is insufficient to win credence, I must be content on this one point to be disbelieved.

CHAPTER IX.

A BLACK LIE.

HAVING placed the poor girl in Priscilla's motherly hands, I fetched the best doctor I could think of, nd efforts were at once made to restore consciousness. It was long before any sign of returning animation showed itself, but, at last, she awoke. Need I say what a supreme moment that was to me.

I need not give details of that return to life. After all, it was but a half return, and brought fresh terrors in its train. When morning dawned it found Pauline raving with what I prayed was but the delirium of fever.

The doctor told me her state was a most critical one. There was hope for her life, but no certainty of saving it. It was during those days of anxiety that I learned how much I loved my unhappy girl. How grateful I should be if she were given back to me, even as I had always known her.

Her wild fevered words cut me to the heart. Sometimes in English, sometimes in soft Italian, she called on some one; spoke words of deep love and sorrow; gave vent to expressions of fond endearment. These were succeeded by cries of grief, and it seemed as if shudders of fear passed over her.

For me there was no word; no look of recognition I, who would have given worlds to hear my name spoken once, during her delirium, with an expression of love, was but a stranger at her bedside.

Whom was it she called for and lamented? Who was the man she and I had seen slain? I soon learned —and if my informant spoke the truth, he had, in so doing, dealt me a blow from which I should never rally

It was Macari who struck it. He called on me the day after Pauline and I had visited that house. I would not see him then. My plans were not formed. For the time I could think of nothing save my wife's danger. But two days afterwards, when he again called, I gave orders for him to be admitted.

I shuddered as I took the hand I dared not yet refuse him, although in my own mind I was certain that a murderer's fingers were clasped round my own. Perhaps the very fingers which had once closed on my throat. Yet, with all I knew, I doubted whether I could bring him to justice.

Unless Pauline recovered, the evidence I could bring would be of no weight. Even the victim's name was unknown to me. Before the accusation would lie his remains must be found and identified. It was hopeless to think of punishing the murderer, now that more than three years had elapsed since the crime.

Besides—was he Pauline's brother?

Brother or not, I would unmask him. I would show him that the crime was no longer a secret; that an outsider knew every detail. I would tell him this in the hope that his future would be haunted with the dread of a just vengeance overtaking him.

I knew the name of the street to which Pauline had led me. I had noticed it as we drove from it a few nights ago, and the reason of my drunken guide's mistake was apparent. It was Horace street. My conductor had jumbled up Walpole and Horace in his drink-muddled brain.

On what a slight thread the whole course of a life hangs!

Macari had heard of Pauline's illness and delirium. He was as tenderly solicitous in his inquiries as a brother should be. My replies were cold and brief. Brother or not, he was answerable for everything.

Presently he changed the subject. "I scarcely like to trouble you at such a time, but I should be glad to know if you are willing to join me, as I suggested, in a memorial to Victor Emmanuel?"

"I am not. There are several things I must have explained first."

He bowed politely; but I saw his lips close tightly for a moment.

"I am quite at your service," he said.

"Very well. Before all I must be satisfied that you are my wife's brother."

He raised his thick dark eyebrows and tried to smile.

"That is easily done. Had poor Ceneri been with us, he would have vouched for it."

"But he told me very differently."

"Ah, he had his reasons. No matter, I can bring plenty of other persons."

"Then again," I said, looking him full in the face and speaking very slowly, "I must know why you murdered a man three years ago in a house in Horace street."

Whichever the fellow felt—fear or rage—the expression of his face was that of blank astonishment. Not, I knew, the surprise of innocence, but of wonder that the crime should be known. For a moment his jaw dropped and he gaped at me in silence.

Then he recovered. "Are you mad, Mr. Vaughan?" he cried.

"On the 20th of August, 186—, at No. — Horace street, you stabbed here, to the heart, a young man who was sitting at the table. Dr. Ceneri was in the room at the time, also another man with a scar on his face."

He attempted no evasion. He sprang to his feet with features convulsed with rage. He seized my arm. For a moment I thought he meant to attack me, but found he only wanted to scan my face attentively. I did not shrink from his inspection. I hardly thought he would recognize me; so great a change does blindness make in a face.

But he knew me. He dropped my arm and stamped his foot in fury.

"Fools! Idiots!" he hissed. "Why did they not let me do the work thoroughly!"

He walked once or twice up and down the room, and then with regained composure stood in front of me.

"You are a great actor, Mr. Vaughan," he said, with a coolness and cynicism which appalled me. "You deceived even me, and I am very suspicious."

"You do not even deny the crime, you villain?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I, to an eye witness? To others I will deny it fast enough. Besides, as you are interested in the matter, there is n occasion to do so."

"I am interested!"

"Certainly; as you married my sister. Now my fine fellow! my gay bridegroom! my dear brother-in-law! I will tell why I killed that man and what I meant by my words to you at Geneva."

His air of bitter, callous mockery, as he spoke these words made me dread what was to come. My hands were tingling to throw him from the room.

"That man—I shall not for obvious reasons tell you his name—was Pauline's lover. Translate 'lover' into Italian—into what the word *drudo* signifies in that language—then you will understand my meaning. We, on our mother's side have noble blood in our veins—blood which brooks no insult. He was Pauline's, your wife's, lover, I say again. He had no wish to marry her, and so Ceneri and I killed him—killed him in London—even in her presence. As I told you once before, Mr. Vaughan, it is well to marry a woman who cannot recall the past."

I made no reply. So hideous a statement called for no comment. I simply rose and walked towards him. He saw my purpose written in my face. "Not here," he said hastily, and moving away from me: "what good can it do here—a vulgar scuffle between two gentlemen? No; on the Continent—anywhere, meet me, and I will show you how I hate you."

He spoke well, the self-possessed villain! What good could it do? An unseemly struggle, in which I could scarcely hope to kill him; and Pauline the while perhaps upon the point of death!

"Go," I cried, murderer and coward! Every word you have ever spoken to me has been a lie, and because you hate me, you have to-dav told me the greatest lie of all. Go ; save yourself from the gallows by flight."

He gave me a look of malicious triumph and left me. The air in the room seemed purer now that he no longer breathed it.

Then I went to Pauline's room, and sitting by her bed heard her parched lips ever and ever calling in English or Italian on some one she loved. Heard them beseeching and warning, and knew that her wild words were addressed to the man whom Macari averred he had slain because he was the lover of his sister—my wife!

The villain lied! I knew he lied. Over and over again I told myself it was a black, slanderous lie—that Pauline was as pure as an angel. But, as I strove to comfort myself with these assertions, I knew that, lie as it was, until I could prove it such, it would rankle in my heart ; would be ever with me ; would grow until I mistook it for truth ; would give me not a moment's rest or peace, until it made me curse the day when Kenyon led me inside that old church to see "the fairest sight of all."

How could I prove the untruth? There were but two other persons in the world who knew Pauline's history—Ceneri and old Teresa. Teresa had disappeared and Ceneri was in the Siberian mines or some other living grave. Even as I thought of the old Italian woman, Macari's slander began to throw forth its first poisonous shoots. Her mysterious words, "Not for love or marriage," might bear another meaning, a dishonorable meaning. And other circumstances would come to me. Ceneri's haste to get his niece married—his wish to get rid of her. Thoughts of this sort would steal into my mind until they half maddened me.

I could bear to sit with Pauline no longer. I went out into the open air and wandered about aimlessly, until two ideas occurred to me. One was that I would go to the greatest authority on brain diseases, and consult him as to Pauline's hope of recovery—the other that I would go to Horace street and examine, by day-light, the house from top to bottom. I went first to the doctor's.

To him I told every thing, saving, of course, Macari's black lie. I could see no other way to explain the case without confiding fully. I most certainly succeeded in arousing his interest. He had already seen Pauline and knew exactly the state in which she had been. I think he believed, as many others will, all I told him except that one strange occurrence. Even this he did not scoff at, accustomed as he was to wild fancies and freaks of imagination. He attributed it to this cause; which was but natural—And now what comfort or hope could he give me?

"As I told you before, Mr. Vaughan," he said, "such a thing as losing the recollection of the past for a long while and then picking up the end of the thread where it fell is not altogether unprecedented. I will come and see your wife; but as the case now stands, it seems to me it is an attack of brain fever, and as yet no specialist is needed. When that fever leaves her I should like to know, that I may see her. It will, I expect, leave her sane, but she will begin life again from the hour that her mind was first unhinged. You, her husband, may even be as a stranger to her. The case, I say again, is not unprecedented, but the circumstances which surround it are."

I left the doctor and walked to the agents in whose hands the house in Horace street was placed. I obtained the keys and made some inquiries. I found that at the time of the murder the house had been let furnished for a few weeks to an Italian gentleman whose name was forgotten. He had paid the rent in advance, so no inquiries had been made about him. The house had been vacant for a long time. There was nothing against it except that the owner would only let it at a certain rent, which most people appeared to consider too high.

I gave my name and address and took the keys. I spent the remainder of the afternoon in searching every nook and cranny in the house, but no discovery rewarded my labor. There was, I believed, no place in which the body of a victim could have been hid—there was no garden in which it might have been buried. I took back the keys and said the house did not suit me. Then I returned home, and brooded on my grief, whilst Macari's lie ate and ate its way to my heart.

And day by day it went on working and gnawing, corroding and warping, until I was told that the crisis was over; that Pauline was out of danger; that she was herself again.

Which self? The self I had only known, or the self before that fatal night? With a beating heart I drew near to her bedside. Weak, exhausted, without strength to move or speak she opened her eyes and looked at me. It was a look of wonder, of non-recognition, but it was the look of restored reason. She knew me not. It was as the doctor had predicted. I might have been a total stranger to those beautiful eyes as they opened, gazed at me, and then reclosed themselves wearily. I went from the room with tears running down my cheeks, and at my heart a feeling of mingled joy and sorrow, hope and fear, which words will not express.

Then Macari's black lie came creeping out of its lurking place and seized me as it were by the throat—clung to me, wrestled with me—cried, "I am true! Push me away, I am still true. The lips of a villain spoke to me, but for once he spoke the truth. If not for this, why the crime? Men do not lightly commit murder."

Even then, when the moment I had prayed and longed for had come—when sense, full sense, was given back to my poor love—I was invaded, conquered and crushed to the ground by the foul lie which might be true.

"We are strangers—she knows me not," I cried. "Let me prove that this lie is a lie or let us be strangers forever!"

How could I prove it? How could I ask Pauline. Or asking her, how could I expect her to answer? Even if she did, would her word satisfy me? Oh that I could see Ceneri! Villain he might be, but I felt he was not such a double-dyed villain as Macari.

Thinking thus, I formed a desperate resolve. Men are urged to do strange and desperate things when life is at stake—with me it was more than life. It was the honor, the happiness—every thing, of two people!

Yes, I would do it! Mad as the scheme seemed, I would go to Siberia, and if money, perseverance, favor, or craft could bring me face to face with Ceneri, I would wring the truth, the whole truth from his lips!

CHAPTER X.

IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH.

ACROSS Europe—half-way across Asia—for the sake of an hour's interview with a Russian political prisoner! It was a wild scheme, but I was determined to carry it out. If my plan was a mad one, I would, at least, insure a chance of its success by putting all the method I could in my preparations. I would not rush wildly to my journey's end and find it rendered fruitless by the stupidity or suspicion of some one vested with brief authority. No; I must go armed with credentials which no one would dare to dispute. Money, one of the most important of all, I had plenty of, and was ready to use freely; but there were others which were indispensable; my first step would be to obtain these. I could go quietly and systematically to work, for it would be days before I could venture to leave Pauline. Only when all chance of danger was at an end could I begin my journey.

So during those days whilst the poor girl was gradually, but very, very slowly, regaining strength, I looked up what friends I possessed among the great people of the land, until I found one whose position was such that he could ask a favor of a far greater man than himself, and, moreover, expect that it should be granted without delay. He did this for my sake with such efficacy that I received a letter of introduction to the English ambassador at St. Petersburgh, and also the copy of a letter which had been forwarded him containing instructions on my behalf. Each of the letters bore an autograph which would insure every assistance being given to me. With these, and the addition of a letter of credit for a large amount on a St. Petersburgh bank, I was ready to start.

But before I left, Pauline's safety and well-being during these months of absence must be considered. The difficulties this presented almost made me abandon, or, at least, postpone, the execution of my plan. Yet I knew it must be carried out to the very letter, or Macari's lie would ever stand between my wife and myself. Better I should go at once while we were strangers; better, if Ceneri by word or silence confirmed the shameful tale, that we should never meet again!

Pauline would be left in good hands. Priscilla would do my bidding faithfully and fully. The old woman was by this time quite aware that her charge had awakened to both memory and new forgetfulness. She knew the reason why for days and days I had not even entered the room. She knew that I considered Pauline, in her present state, no more my wife than when I first met her in Turin. She knew that some mystery was attached to our relations with each other, and that I was bound upon a long journey to clear this up. She was content with this knowledge or sought to obtain no more than I chose to give her.

My instructions were minute. As soon as she was well enough Pauline was to be taken to the seaside. Every thing was to be done for her comfort and according to her wishes. If she grew curious she was to be told that some near relation, who was now journeying abroad, had placed her in Priscilla's hands, where she was to stay until his return. But, unless the recollection of the past few months came to her, she was to be told nothing as to her true position as my wife. Indeed, I doubted now if she was legally my wife—whether, if she wished, she might not annul the marriage by stating that at the time it took place she was not in her right mind. When I returned from my expedition—if things were right, as I told myself they must be, all would have to be begun again from the beginning.

I had ascertained that, since the departure of the fever, Pauline had said nothing about the terrible deed she had witnessed three years ago. I feared that when her health was re-established her first wish would be to make some stir in the matter. It was hard to see what she could possibly do. Macari, I learned, had left England the day after I accused him of the crime; Ceneri was out of reach. I hoped that Pauline might be induced to remain quiet until my return; and I instructed Priscilla, in the event of her recurring to the subject of a great crime committed by persons she knew, to inform her that all was being done to bring the guilty to their deserts. I trusted she would, with her usual docility, rest contented with this scarcely correct assertion.

Priscilla was to write to me—to St. Petersburgh, Moscow, and other places I must stop at, going and returning. I left directed envelopes with her, and would send from St. Petersburgh instructions as to the dates when the various letters should be posted. And then all I could think of was done.

All except one thing. To-morrow morning I must start. My passport is duly signed; my trunks are packed —every thing ready. Once, once for a moment, I must see her before I sleep to-night—see her, it may be for the last time. She was sleeping soundly—Priscilla told me so. Once more I must look upon that beautiful face that I may carry its exact image with me for thousands of miles.

I crept upstairs and entered her room. I stood by the bedside and gazed with eyes full of tears on my wife—yet not my wife. I felt like a criminal, a desecrator, so little right, I knew, I had to be in that room. Her pale pure face lay on the pillow—the fairest face in all the world to me. Her bosom rose and fell with her soft regular breathing. Fair and white as an angel she looked, and I swore, as I gazed on her, that no word of man should make me doubt her innocence. Yet I would go to Siberia.

I would have given worlds for the right to lay my lips on hers! to have been able to awake her with a kiss and see those long dark lashes, rise, and her eyes beam with love for me. Even as it was I could not refrain from kissing her gently on the temple, just where the soft thick hair began to grow. She stirred in her sleep, her eyelids quivered, and like one detected at the commencement of a crime, I fled.

The next day I was hundreds of miles away, and my mind was in a sterner frame. If when I reached, if ever I did reach, Ceneri, I found that Macari had not lied—found that I had been fooled, cajoled, made a tool of, I should, at least, have the grim consolation of revenge. I should be able to gloat upon the misery of the man who had deceived me and used me for his own purpose. I should see him dragging out his wretched life in chains and degradation. I should see him a slave, beaten and ill-treated. If this was the only reward I should reap it would repay me for my long journey. Perhaps, considering all that had passed and my present anxiety and dread, this unchristian state of mind was not unnatural to an ordinary son of Adam.

St. Petersburgh at last! The letter I bear, and the letter already received on my account, insure me a gracious reception from her majesty's noble representative in the Russian capital. My request is listened to attentively; not scouted as ridiculous. I am told it is unprecedented, but the words impossible to be granted are not used. There are difficulties, great difficulties, in the way, but as my business is purely of a domestic nature, with no political tendency, and as the letters bear the magic autograph of a person whom the noble lord is eager to oblige, I am not told that the obstacles are insuperable. I must wait patiently for days, it may be weeks, but I can be sure that everything will be done that can be done. There is, at present, or so the newspapers say, a little friction between the two Governments. Sometimes this is shown by requests more simple than mine being refused. Still we shall see——

Meanwhile, who is the prisoner, and where is he?

Ah! that I cannot say. I only know him as a doctor named Ceneri—an Italian—an apostle of freedom—patriot—conspirator. I was not foolish enough to imagine he had been tried and sentenced under the name I knew him by. I supposed this to be a false one.

Lord —— was certain that no one of that name had been sentenced within the last few months. That mattered little. Permission accorded, with the data I had given, the man would at once be identified by the police. Now, good morning—as soon as possible I should hear from the embassy.

"And one word of caution, Mr. Vaughan," said his lordship. "You are not in England. Remember that a hasty word, even a look; a casual remark to a stranger you sit next at dinner, may utterly defeat your ends. The system of government here is different from ours."

I thanked him for his advice, although I needed no warning. The truth is that an Englishman in Russia has an even exaggerated dread of spies and the consequences of a loose tongue. More of us are looked upon with suspicion from our taciturnity than from our garrulity. I was not likely to err on the latter point.

I went back to my hotel, and for the next few days whiled away the time as best I could. Not that, under ordinary circumstances, I should have found much difficulty in so doing. St. Petersburgh was one of the places I had always wished to visit. Its sights were new and strange to me; its customs worth studying; but I took little interest in anything I saw. I was longing to be away in pursuit of Ceneri.

I was not foolish enough to pester the ambassador and make myself a nuisance. Believing he would do all he could, I waited patiently and in silence until I received a letter asking me to call at the embassy. Lord —— received me kindly.

"It is all settled," he said. "You will go to Siberia armed with authority which the most ignorant jailor or soldier will recognize. Of course, I have pledged my honor that in no way will you connive at the convict's escape—that your business is purely private."

I expressed my thanks, and asked for instructions.

"First of all," he said, "my instructions are to take you to the palace. The Czar desires to see the eccentric Englishman who wishes to make such a long journey in order to ask a few questions."

I would right willingly have declined the honor, but as there was no chance of escaping from it, nerved my self to meet the autocrat as well as I could. The ambassador's carriage was at the door, and in a few minutes we were driven to the Imperial palace.

I retain a confused recollection of gigantic sentries glittering officers, grave looking ushers and other officials; noble staircases and halls; paintings, statues, tapestry and gilding; then, following my conductor, I entered a large apartment, at one end of which stood a tall noble-looking man in military attire; and I realized that I was in the presence of him whose nod could sway millions and millions of his fellow-creatures—the Emperor of all the Russias—the White Czar Alexander II. The sovereign whose rule stretches from the highest civilization of Europe to the lowest barbarism of Asia.

Two years ago, when the news of his cruel death reached England, I thought of him as I saw him that day—in the prime of life, tall, commanding and gracious —a man it does one good to look at. Whether—if the whole truth of his great ancestor Catharine the Second's frailties were known—the blood of a peasant or a king ran in his veins, he looked every inch a ruler of men, a splendid despot.

To me he was particularly kind and condescending. His manner set me as much at my ease as it is possible for a man to be in such august company. Lord —— presented me by name, and after a proper reference I waited the Czar's commands.

He looked at me for a second from his towering height. Then he spoke to me in French fluently and without much foreign accent:

"I am told you wish to go to Siberia."

"With your majesty's gracious permission."

"To see a political prisoner. Is that so?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"It is a long journey for such a purpose."

"My business is of the most vital importance, your majesty."

"Private importance, I understand from Lord ——"

He spoke in a quick, stern way which showed that he admitted of no prevarication. I hastened to assure him of the purely private nature of my desired interview with the criminal.

"Is he a dear friend of yours?"

"Rather an enemy, your majesty; but my happiness and my wife's happiness are at stake."

He smiled at my explanation. "You English are good to your wives. Very well, Mr. Vaughan, it shall be as you wish. The minister of the Interior will provide you with the fullest passports and authorities. *Bon voyage.*"

Thus dismissed, I bowed myself out, praying mentally that no red-tapism or bureaucracy might delay the transmission of the promised documents.

In three days I received them. The passport authorized me to travel to the end of the Czar's Asiatic dominions if I thought fit, and was worded in such a way that it obviated the necessity of obtaining a fresh passport whenever a fresh government district was to be traversed. It was not until I found the trouble, annoyance and delay I was saved by this magic strip of paper, that I fully realized how much favor had been shown me. Those few words of writing, unintelligible to me, were a magic spell, the potency of which none dared to resist.

But now, armed with power to travel, the question was, where must I go? To ascertain this, I was taken to one of the heads of the police. To him I explained my case. I described Ceneri, gave him what I supposed was about the date of his crime and trial, and begged for information as to the best means to adopt to find him in the place of his banishment.

"I was most civilly treated. Indeed, for courtesy commend me to the Russian official when you are properly and powerfully accredited. Ceneri was at once identified, and his right name and secret history given to me. I recognized the name at once.

There is no need to make it public. There are many men in Europe who believe in the disinterested character and noble aims of the unfortunate convict; men who mourn him as a martyr. Perhaps in the cause of liberty he was single-hearted and noble-minded. Why should I distress his followers by revealing any dark secrets of his private life? Let him be, so far as I am concerned, Dr. Ceneri to the end.

I learned from the suave, obliging Russian chief of police, that a few weeks after I had seen him in Geneva, Ceneri had been arrested in St. Petersburgh. A deeply laid plot, involving the assassination of the Czar and several members of the government, had been revealed through the treachery of a confederate. The police, fully cognizant of everything, had waited until the pear was nearly ripe, and then struck with dire results to the plotters. Scarcely one of the principals escaped, and Ceneri, one of the most deeply implicated, was shown scant mercy. He certainly had few claims on their consideration. He was no Russian groaning under oppression and despotic government Although he called himself Italian, he was, in truth, cosmopolitan. One of those restless spirits who wish to overturn all forms of government, save that of republican. He had plotted and schemed—even fought like a man—for Italian freedom. He had been one of Garibaldi's most trusted workmen; but had turned fiercely against his master when he found Italy was to be a kingdom, not the ideal republic of his dreams. Latterly he had directed his attention to Russia, and the plot he was engaged in having been betrayed, his career, in all human probability, was ended. After lying many months in the fortress of St. Peter and Paul, he was tried and condemned to twenty years' hard labor in Siberia Some months ago he had been dispatched to his destination, and, my informant added, was considered to have been dealt with most leniently.

Where was he now? That could not be said for certain. He might be at the Kara gold-washings, at the Ustkutsk salt works, at Troitsk, at Nertschinsk. All convicts were first sent to Tobolsk, which was a kind of general rendezvous; thence they were drafted off, at the pleasure of the Governor-General, to various places and various occupations.

If I wished, the Governor of Tobolsk should be telegraphed or written to; but, as I was bound anyway to go to that town, it would be just as well if I made my inquiries in person. To this I quite agreed, mistrusting the speed of the Russian post or the newly opened telegraph. I was ready to start to-morrow.

So, after getting all the hints and information I could, I thanked the chief for his courtesy, and with my precious papers in my pocket, went to complete my preparations for my journey; a journey which might be a thousand or two thousand miles longer or shorter, according to where it had pleased the Governor of Tobolsk to bestow the wretched Ceneri.

Before I started I received a letter from Priscilla—one of those labored and rather misty epistles usually written by people of her station in life. It told me that Pauline was well; that she was willing to be guided by Priscilla's advice, and to remain with her until the return of her unknown relation or friend. "But, Master Gilbert," the letter went on, "I am sorry to say I believe she is not quite right at times. The poor young lady talks wildly about an awful crime; but she says she is content to wait for justice to be done, as some one she has seen in her dreams during her illness is working for her. She doesn't know who it is, but it is some one who knows everything."

This intelligence made me feel easier. Not only did it show me that Pauline would wait quietly until my return, but also that some glimmering of the immediate past might be dawning upon her. The closing lines of Pauline's letter made my heart beat with hope.

"This afternoon, Master Gilbert, she seemed to discover for the first time that she had a wedding ring on her finger. She asked me how it came there. I told her I could not say. Then she sat for hours and hours twisting it round and round, thinking and thinking. I asked her, at last, what she was thinking of. 'Dreams I am trying to remember,' said she, with that pretty quiet smile of hers. I was dying to tell the dear young lady that she was my own master's lawful wife. I was afraid she would take the ring off, but she didn't, thank God!"

Yes, thank God, she did not! As I read Priscilla's letter I yearned to turn homewards and fly back to my wife. But I conquered the inclination, although I felt more and more certain that my meeting with Ceneri would be a happy one for me; that I should return, and, if necessary, once more place that ring on her finger and claim her as my own, knowing that she was purer than the gold of which that shining circlet was made.

Pauline! my beautiful Pauline! my wife, my love, we shall be happy yet!

The next day I started for Siberia.

CHAPTER XI.

A HELL UPON EARTH.

IT was midsummer when I left St. Petersburgh. The heat was oppressive and quite disturbed my idea of the Russian climate. I went by rail to Moscow, by the iron road which runs straight as a line from the one large city to the other. The Czar ordered it to be so made, without curves or deviations. When the engineers asked him what populous places they should take on their way, his Imperial Majesty took a ruler and on the map ruled a straight line from St. Petersburgh to Moscow. "Make it so," were his commands, and so it was made, as rigid and careless of the convenience of other persons as his own despotism—a railway for some four hundred miles running simply to its destination, not daring, however much tempted, to swerve aside and disobey the autocrat's commands.

At Moscow the colossal I lingered a couple of days. It was there I had settled to engage a guide and interpreter. As I spoke two or three languages besides my own, I was able to pick and choose, and at last selected a pleasant mannered, sharp-looking young fellow, who averred that he knew every inch of the great post road to the east. Then bidding farewell to the mighty Kremlin with its churches, watch towers and battlements, I started with my new companion for Nijnei Novgorod; at which place we must bid adieu to the railway.

We passed the old picturesque but decaying town of Vladimir, and after duly admiring its five domed cathedral I found nothing more to distract my attention until we reached Nijnei. My companion was very anxious that we should linger for a day or two at this city. The great fair was on, and he assured me it was a sight not to be missed. I had not come to Russia to look at fairs or festivities, so commanded him to make instant preparations for continuing the journey.

We now changed our mode of conveyance. Being summer the rivers were open and navigation practicable. We took the steamer and went down the broad Volga till we passed Kasan and reached the river Kama. Up this tortuous stream we went until we landed at th large important town of Perm.

We were five days on the water—I think the five longest days I ever spent. The winding river, the slow-going steamer, made me long for the land again; there one seemed to be making progress. The road there was straight, not running into a hundred bends.

We were now nearly at the end of Europe. A hundred miles further and we shall cross the Ural mountains and be in Asiatic Russia.

At Perm we made our final preparations. From now we must depend on post horses. Ivan, my guide, after the proper amount of haggling, bought a tarantass—a sort of phaeton. The luggage was stowed into it; we took our seats; our first relay of horses were engaged—three in number and harnessed in the peculiar Russian fashion—the yemschik started them with the words of encouragement and endearment which in Russia are supposed to be more efficacious than the thong, and away we went on our long, long drive.

We crossed the Urals, which after all are not so very high. We passed the stone obelisk erected, Ivan told me, in honor of a Cossack chief named Yermak. We read the word "Europe" on the side which first met our eyes, and turning round saw "Asia" written on the back. I spent my first night in Asia at Ekaterineburg; and lay awake the best part of it trying to calculate how many miles stretched between Pauline and myself. For days and days have passed since I left St. Petersburg, and I have travelled at all possible speed; yet the journey seems scarcely begun. Indeed, I cannot even guess at its length until I get to Tobolsk.

A trifle of some four hundred miles from Ekaterineburg to Tiumen, another of two hundred from Tiumen to

Tobolsk, and I shall await the pleasure of the Governor-General and what information he may choose to give me.

The carriage and ourselves are ferried across the broad yellow Irtuish—that river, the crossing of which by a Russian officer at once raises him a step in rank: for such is the inducement held out to serve in Siberia; and at the east bank of the Irtuish Siberia proper begins

Tobolsk at last! The sight of my passports renders the Governor civility itself. He invited me to dine with him, and, as for prudential reasons, I thought it better to accept his invitation, treated me royally. His register told me all I wanted to know about Ceneri. He had been sent to the very extreme of the Czar's dominions, as his was a case which called for special severity. Where he would finish his journey was not settled, but that made little difference to me. As he would travel the greater part of the way on foot, and as there was but one road, I must overtake him, although he left Tobolsk months ago. The escort which accompanied that particular gang of prisoners was under the command of Captain Varlámoff, to whom his Excellency would write a few lines which I should take with me—he would also give me a supplementary passport signed by himself.

"Where do you think I shall overtake the party?" I asked.

The Governor made a calculation. "Somewhere about Irkutsk," he thought.

And Irkutsk two thousand miles, more or less, from Tobolsk!

I bade the great man a grateful adieu and spurred on at such speed that even the good-tempered Ivan began to grumble. Man, even a Russian, was but mortal, he said, and I could not expect to find Arab steeds among government posthorses, which the postmasters were compelled to furnish at about twopence a mile a horse. I left the yemschik and himself no time for refreshment. The tea had not grown cool enough to swallow before I was insisting on a fresh start. And as for a proper night's rest!

Tea! Until I made that journey I never knew the amount of tea a mortal stomach could hold. One and all they drank it by the gallon. They carried it about compressed into bricks, cemented, I heard with a shudder, by sheep's or some other animal's blood. They drank it morn, noon and night. Whenever there was stoppage and boiling water could be obtained buckets-ul of tea were made and poured down their throats.

The impressions I retain of that long journey are not very deep. I was not traversing the country for the sake of writing a book of travels, or to observe the manners and customs of the people. My great object was to overtake Ceneri as quickly as possible, and my endeavors were directed to passing from one posting station to another as swiftly as I could. We sped over vast steppes, wild marshes, through forests of birch, tall pines, oak, ash, and other trees; we were ferried over broad rivers. On and on we went as straight to our destination as the great post road would take us. When nature forced us to rest we had to put up with such pitiful accommodation as we could get. Unless the place at which we stopped was of some importance, inns were unknown. By dint of practice I at last contrived to obtain almost enough sleep, if not to satisfy me, to serve my needs whilst jostling along in the tarantass.

It was a monotonous journey. I turned aside to visit no objects of interest spoken of by travellers. From morn to night and generally through the greater part of the night our wheels rolled along the road. And at every posting station I read on the wooden post which stands in front of it the number of miles we were from St. Petersburgh, until, as the days and weeks passed, I began to feel appalled at the distance I had come and the distance I must return. Should I ever see Pauline again? Who can say what may have happened before I return to England? At times I grew quite dispirited.

I think what made me realize the length of the jour ney even more than days or measured miles was to see, as we went on, the country people gradually changing their costume and dialect. The yemschiks who drove us changed in appearance and in nationality ; the very breed of the horses varied. But let man or cattle be of what kind they may, we were well and skillfully conducted.

The weather was glorious, almost too glorious. The cultivated country we passed through looked thriving and productive. Siberia was very different in appearance from what is usually associated with its name. The air when not too warm was simply delicious. Never have I breathed a more invigorating and bracing atmosphere. There were days when the breeze seemed to send new life through every vein.

The people I thought fairly honest, and whenever I found a need of producing my papers the word civility will scarcely express the treatment I received. How I should have been treated without these potent talismans I cannot say.

The whole country-side in most places was busy with the hay-harvest; a matter of such importance to the community at large that convicts are told off for some six weeks to assist in the work of saving the crops. The wild flowers, many of them very beautiful, grew freely; the people looked well and contented. Altogether my impressions of Siberia in summer were pleasant ones.

Yet I wished it had been the dead of winter. Then it is, that in spite of the cold, one travels more pleasantly. Ivan assured me that when a good snow road is formed and a tarantass may be exchanged for a sledge, the amount of ground passed over in a day is something marvellous. I am afraid from memory to say how many miles may be covered in twenty-four hours when the smooth-going runners take the place of wheels.

We had, of course, various small accidents and delays on the road. However strongly built a tarantass may be it is but mortal. Wheels broke, axletrees gave way, shafts snapped, twice we were overturned, but as no evil except delay ensued I need not relate the history of these misfortunes.

Nor need I enumerate the towns and villages through which we passed unless I wished to make my story as interesting as a scriptural genealogy—Tara, Kainsk, Koliuvan, Tomsk, Achinsk, Krasnoyarsk, Nijnei Udinsk, may or may not be familiar to the reader, according to the depth of his geographical studies; but most of the others, even if I knew how to spell their names, would be nothing more than vain sounds. Perhaps, when we trace the march of the Russian army destined to invade our Indian Empire we may become better acquainted with the Czar's Asiatic dominions.

Yet at the entrance to each of these little towns or villages, the very names of which I have forgotten, so surely as you found the well-appointed posting station, you found also a gloomy square building, varying with the size of the place, surrounded by a tall palisade, the gates of which were barred, bolted and sentried—these buildings were the ostrogs, or prisons.

Here it was that the wretched convicts were housed as they halted on their long march. In these places they were packed like sardines in a box. Prisons built to hold two hundred were often called upon to accommodate at least twice that number of luckless wretches. I was told that when ice was breaking up in the rivers; when the floods were out; when in fact the progress must perforce be delayed, the scenes at these prisons or depots beggared description. Men, sometimes unsexed women with them, huddled into rooms reeking with filth, the floors throwing out poisonous emanations—rooms built to give but scanty space to a small number, crowded to suffocation. The mortality at times was fearful. The trials of the march were as nothing when compared to the horrors of the so-called rest. And it was in one of these ostrogs I should find Ceneri.

We passed many gangs of convicts plodding along to their fate. Ivan told me that most of them were in chains. This I should not have noticed, as the irons are only on the legs and worn under the trowsers. Poor wretched beings, my heart ached for them! Felons though they were, I could never refuse the charity they invariably prayed for. So far as I could see they were not unkindly treated by the soldiers and officers, but terrible tales were told me about their sufferings at the hands of inhuman jailors and commandants of prisons. There, for the slightest infraction of rules, the rod, the dark cell and a variety of other punishments were called into play.

I always felt relieved when we had passed out of sight of a gang like this. The contrast between my own position and that of such a number of my fellow men was too painful to contemplate—and yet if Ceneri did not clear away every shadow of doubt from my mind I might retrace my steps a more miserable wretch than either of those foot-sore convicts.

Some week or ten days after leaving Tobolsk I began to make inquiries at every ostrog as to when Captain Varlámoff's gang passed, and when I might expect to overtake it. The answers I received to the latter question corresponded with that given me by the governor—all agreed at Irkutsk, or just beyond. Day after day I found we were gaining rapidly upon the party, and when at last we reached the large handsome town of Irkutsk I rightly reckoned that I had reached the end or nearly the end of my journey.

On inquiry I found that Captain Varlámoff had not yet arrived. At the place where I had last inquired I had been told he had passed through a day before, so it was evident we had overlooked and outstripped them. The best thing to be done was to wait in Irkutsk the arrival of the party.

I was not at all sorry to take a couple of days' rest after my fatigues. I was not sorry to indulge once more in the comforts of comparative civilization; yet nearly every hour I was sending down to inquire if the convicts had arrived. More ardently than I had longed to reach Irkutsk, I longed to turn the horses' heads westward and start on the return journey.

I had heard no news from home since I left St. Petersburgh. Indeed, I could not expect a letter, as, after my departure from Nijnei Novgorod, I had positively outstripped the post. On the road home I hoped to find letters waiting me.

After I had kicked my heels in Irkutsk for two days I received the welcome news that Captain Varlámoff had marched his prisoners to the ostrog at four o'clock that afternoon. I rose from my dinner and went with all speed to the prison.

A man in plain clothes—a civilian—demanding to be conducted to the presence of a Russian captain who had just arrived from a long march, seemed almost too great a joke for the sentries to bear in a soldierlike manner. Their stolid faces broke into scornful smiles as they asked Ivan if "the little father" had gone quite mad. It required much firmness, much persuasion and a gratuity, which to the simple military mind represented an unlimited quantity of "vodka," and consequently many happy drinking bouts, before I was allowed to pass through the gates of the high palisade, and, with many misgivings on the part of my guide, was conducted to the presence of the captain.

A fine fierce-looking young soldier, who glared at me for disturbing him; for having, by advice, adopted the Russian costume, which by now was stained and frayed by travel, there was nothing to show him I was not a civilian whom any soldier might kick at his pleasure.

It was delightful to see the change the perusal of the Tobolsk governor's letter made in the captain's appearance. He rose, and with the greatest courtesy offered me a chair, and asked me in French if I spoke that language.

I assured him on that point, and finding I could dispense with Ivan's services sent him outside to wait for me.

Varlámoff would not hear of commencing business until wine and cigarettes made their appearance—then he was at my service in any thing and every thing.

I told him what I desired.

"To speak in private with one of my convicts. Certainly—this letter places me at your commands. But which convict?"

I gave him the true name. He shook his head.

"I know none of them by that name. Most of the names the political prisoners pass under are false ones. When they leave me they will become numbers, so it doesn't matter."

I suggested Ceneri. He shook his head again. "I know the man I want is with you," I said. "How shall I find him?"

"You know him by sight?"

"Yes—well."

"Then you had better come with me and try and pick him out among my unfortunates. Light another cigarette—you will want it," he added with meaning.

He led the way, and soon we stood before a heavy door. At his command a jailor, armed with mighty keys, appeared. The grinding locks were turned, and the door was opened.

"Follow me," said Varlámoff, with a long pull at his cigarette. I obeyed, and standing on the threshold had much ado to keep from fainting.

From the stench which rushed through it, that opened door might have been the entrance to some pestilential cavern at the bottom of which all the impurities of the world were rotting and putrefying. As it passed you, you felt that the thick air was poisonous with disease and death.

I recovered myself as best I could, and followed my guide into the grim interior. The door closed behind us.

Had I the power to describe the sights I saw when my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I should not be believed. The prison was spacious, but, when the number of the prisoners was considered, it should have been three times the size. It was thronged with wretched beings. They were standing, sitting and lying about. Men of all ages and, it seemed, of all nationalities. Men with features of the lowest human type. They were huddled in groups—many were quarreling, cursing and swearing. Moved by curiosity they pressed around us as closely as they dared, laughing and jabbering in their barbarous dialects. I was in a hell, an obscene, unclean hell! a hell made by men for their fellow-men.

Filth! the place was one mass of it. Filth under foot—filth on the walls, the rafters and the beams—filth floating about in the hot, heavy, pestiferous air. Each man seemed to be a moving mass of filth. Zola would revel in a minute description of the horrors of that place, but I must leave them to the imagination, although I know and even trust that no one's imagination can come near the reality.

The only thing I could think of was this. Why did not these men rush out, overpower the guards, and escape from this reeking den? I put the question to Varlámoff.

"They never attempt to escape while on the march," he said. "It is a point of honor among them. If one escapes those left are treated with much greater severity."

"Do none ever get away?"

"Yes, many do when they are sent to the works. But it does them no good. They must pass through the towns on their flight or they would starve. Then they are always caught and sent back."

I was peering into all the faces about, trying to find the one I sought. My inspection was received with looks sullen, suspicious, defiant or careless. Remarks were made in undertones, but Varlámoff's dreaded presence kept me from insult. I examined many groups without success, then I made a tour of the prison.

All along the wall was a slanting platform upon which men lay in various attitudes. Being the most comfortable station every inch of it was covered by recumbent forms. In the angle formed by the prison walls I saw a man reclining, as if utterly worn out. His head sank down upon his breast, his eyes were closed. There was something in his figure which struck me as familiar. I walked to him and laid my hand upon his shoulder. He opened his weary eyes and raised his sad face. It was Manuel Ceneri!

CHAPTER XII.

THE NAME OF THE MAN.

HE looked at me with an expression in his eyes which passed at once from hopelessness to bewilderment. He seemed to be uncertain whether it was a phantom or a man he was looking at. He rose to his feet in a dazed, stupefied way, and stood face to face with me, whilst his wretched fellow-prisoners pressed curiously around us.

"Mr. Vaughan!" Here! In Siberia!" he said, as one not believing his own senses.

"I have come from England to see you. This is the prisoner I am looking for," I said, turning to the officer who stood at my side, mitigating to some extent the noxiousness of the atmosphere by the cigarette he puffed vigorously.

"I am glad you have found him," he said politely. "Now the sooner we get outside the better; the air here is unhealthy."

Unhealthy! It was fetid! I was filled with wonder, as I looked at the bland French-speaking captain at my side, at the state of mind to which a man must bring himself before he could calmly stand in the midst of his fellow-creatures and see such misery unconcernedly—could even think he was but doing his duty. Perhaps he was. It may be the crimes of the prisoners forbade sympathy. But, oh! to stand there in the midst of those poor wretches, turned for the time into little more than animals! I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the jailer must have a harder heart than the worst of his captives!

"I can see him—talk to him alone?" I asked.

"Certainly; so you are authorized to do. I am a soldier; you in this matter are my superior officer."

"May I take him to the inn?"

"I think not. I will find you a room here. Please follow me. Phew! that is a relief."

We were now outside the prison door and breathing fresh air once more. The captain led me to a kind of office, dirty and furnished barely enough, but a paradise compared to the scene we had just quitted.

"Wait here; I will send the prisoner to you."

As he turned to leave me I thought of the miserable, dejected appearance Ceneri had presented. Let him be the greatest villain in the world, I could not keep from wishing to do some little thing to benefit him.

"I may give him food and drink?" I asked.

The captain shrugged his shoulders and laughed good temperedly.

"He ought not to be hungry. He has the rations which government says are sufficient. But then you may be hungry and thirsty. If so, I do not see how I can stop you sending for wine and food—of course for yourself."

I thanked him and forthwith dispatched my guide in quest of the best wine and meat he could get. Wine, when ordered by a gentleman, means in Russia but one thing—champagne. At an inn of any standing champagne, or at least its substitute, wine of the Don, may be procured. My messenger soon returned with a bottle of the real beverage and a good supply of cold meat and white bread. As soon as it was placed on the rough table a tall soldier led in my expected guest.

I placed a chair for Ceneri, into which he sank wearily. As he did so I heard the jingle of the irons on his legs. Then I told my interpreter to leave us. The soldier, who, no doubt, had received his orders, saluted me gravely and followed his example. The door closed behind him, and Ceneri and I were alone.

He had somewhat recovered from his stupefaction, and as he looked at me I saw an eager, wistful expression on his face. Drowning as he was, no doubt he caught at the straw of my unexpected appearance, thinking it might assist him to freedom. Perhaps it was to enjoy a moment or two brightened by the faintest or wildest gleam of hope, made him pause before he spoke to me.

"I have come a long, long way to see you, Dr. Ceneri," I began.

"If the way seemed long to you, what has it been to me? You at least can return when you like to freedom and happiness."

He spoke in the quiet tone of despair. I had been unable to prevent my words sounding cold and my voice being stern. If my coming had raised any hope in his heart, my manner now dispelled it. He knew I had not made the journey for his sake.

"Whether I can go back to happiness or not depends on what you tell me. You may imagine it is no light matter which has brought me so far to see you for a few minutes."

He looked at me curiously, but not suspiciously. I could do him no harm—for him the outer world was at an end. If I accused him of fifty murders, and brought each one home to him, his fate would be no worse. He was blotted out, erased; nothing now could matter to him, except more or less bodily discomfort. I shuddered as I realized what his sentence meant, and, in spite of myself, a compassionate feeling stole over me.

"I have much of importance to say, but first let me give you some wine and food."

"Thank you," he said, almost humbly. "You would scarcely believe, Mr. Vaughan, that a man may be reduced to such a state that he can hardly restrain himself at the sight of decent meat and drink."

I could believe anything after the interior of the ostrog. I opened the wine and placed it before him. As he ate and drank, I had leisure to observe him attentively.

His sufferings had wrought a great change in him. Every feature was sharpened, every limb seemed slighter—he looked at least ten years older. He wore the Russian peasants' ordinary garments, and these hung in rags about him. His feet, swathed in fragments of some woolen material, showed in places through his boots. The long, weary marches were telling their tale upon his frame. He had never given me the idea of being a robust man, and as I looked at him I thought that whatever work he might be put to, it would not pay the Russian Government for his sorry keep. But the probabilities were, they would not have to keep him long.

He ate, not voraciously, but with a keen appetite. The wine he used sparingly. His meal being finished, he glanced around as if in quest of something. I guessed what he wanted and passed him my cigar-case and a light. He thanked me and began to smoke with an air of enjoyment.

For a while I had not the heart to interrupt the poor wretch. When he left it must be to return to that hell peopled by human beings. But time was slipping by. Outside the door I could hear the monotonous step of the sentry, and I did not know what period of grace the polite captain might allow to his prisoner.

Ceneri was leaning back in his chair with a kind of dreamy look on his face, smoking slowly and placidly taking, as it were, every thing he could out of the luxury of a good cigar. I asked him to drink some more wine. He shook his head, then turned and looked at me.

"Mr. Vaughan," he said; "yes, it is Mr. Vaughan. But who and what am I? Where are we? Is it London, Geneva, or elsewhere? Shall I awake and find have dreamed of what I have suffered?"

"I am afraid it is no dream. We are in Siberia."

"And you are not come to bear me good news? You are not one of us—a friend trying at the peril of your life to set me free?"

I shook my head. "I would do all I could to make your lot easier, but I come with a selfish motive to ask some questions which you alone can answer."

"Ask them. You have given me an hour's relief from misery; I am grateful."

"You will answer truly?"

"Why not? I have nothing to fear, nothing to gain, nothing to hope. Falsehood is forced on people by circumstances; a man in my state has no need of it."

"The first question I have to ask is—who and what is that man Macari?"

Ceneri sprang to his feet. The name of Macari seemed to bring him back to the world. He looked no longer a decrepit man. His voice was fierce and stern.

"A traitor! a traitor!" he cried. "But for him I should have succeeded and escaped. If he were only standing in your place! weak as I am, I could find strength enough to cling on to his throat till the vile breath was out of his accursed body!"

He walked up and down the room, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"Try and be calm, Dr. Ceneri," I said. "I have nothing to do with his plots and political treasons. Who is he? What is his parentage? Is Macari his name?"

"The only name I ever knew him by. His father was a renegade Italian who sent his son to live in England for fear his precious blood should be spilt in freeing his country. I found him a young man and made him one of us. His perfect knowledge of your tongue was of great service; and he fought—yes, once he fought like a man. Why did he turn traitor now? Why do you ask these questions?"

"He has been to me and asserts that he is Pauline's brother."

Ceneri's face, as he heard this intelligence, was enough to banish lie number one from my mind. My heart leaped as I guessed that number two would be disposed of as easily. But there was a terrible revelation to be made when I came to ask about that.

"Pauline's brother!" stammered Ceneri. "Her brother! She has none."

A sickly look crept over his features as he spoke—a look the meaning of which I could not read.

"He says he is Anthony March, her brother."

"Anthony March!" gasped Ceneri. "There is no such person. What did he want—his object?" he continued feverishly.

"That I should join him in a memorial to the Italian Government, asking for a return of some portion of the fortune you spent."

Ceneri laughed a bitter laugh. "All grows clear," he said. "He betrayed a plot which might have changed a government for the sake of getting me out of the way. Coward! Why not have killed me and only me? Why have made others suffer with me? Anthony March! My God! that man is a villain!"

"You are sure that Macari betrayed you?"

"Sure! yes. I was sure when the man in the cell next to mine rapped it on the wall. He had means of knowing."

"I don't understand you."

"Prisoners can sometimes talk to each other by taps on the wall which divides their cells. The man next me was one of us. Long before he went raving mad from the months of solitary confinement, he rapped out, over and over again, 'Betrayed by Macari.' I believed him. He was too true a man to make the accusation without proof. But until now I could not see the object of the treason."

The easiest part of my task was over. Macari's assumed relationship to Pauline was disposed of. Now, if Ceneri would tell me, I must learn who was the victim of that crime committed years ago, and what was the reason for the foul deed. I must learn that Macari's explanation was an utter falsehood, prompted by malice, or else my journey would have benefitted me nothing. Is it any wonder that my lips trembled as I endeavored to approach the subject?

"Now. Dr. Ceneri," I said, "I have a question of weightier import to ask. Had Pauline a lover before I married her?"

He raised his eyebrows. "Surely you have not come here to ask that question—to have a fit of jealousy cured?"

"No," I said; "you will hear my meaning later on. Meanwhile, answer me."

"She had a lover for Macari professed to love her and swore she should be his wife. But I can most certainly say she never returned his love."

"Nor loved any one else?"

"Not to my knowledge. But your manner, your words are strange. Why do you ask? I may have wronged you, Mr. Vaughan, but save for the one thing, her mind, Pauline was fit to be your wife."

"You did wrong me—you know it. What right had you to let me marry a woman whose senses were disarranged? It was cruel to both."

I felt stern and spoke sternly. Ceneri shifted in his chair uneasily. If I had wished revenge it was here. Gazing on this wretched, ragged, broken-down man, and knowing what awaited him when he left me, would have filled the measure desired by the most vengeful heart.

I wanted no revenge on the man. His manner told me he spoke the truth when he denied that Pauline had ever been in love. As, when last I gazed on her fair face, I knew it would, Macari's black lie had been scouted. Pauline was innocent as an angel. But I must know who was the man whose death had for a while deprived her of reason.

Ceneri was glancing at me nervously. Did he guess what I had to ask him? "Tell me," I said, "the name of the young man murdered by Macari in London, in the presence of Pauline; tell me why he was killed?"

His face grew ashen. He seemed to collapse—to sink back into his chair a helpless heap, without the power of speech or movement, without the power of turning his eyes from my face.

"Tell me," I repeated —— "Stay, I will recall the scene to you, and you will know I am well informed. Here is the table; here is Macari, standing over the man he has stabbed; here are you, and behind you is another man with a scar on his cheek. In the back room, at the piano, is Pauline. She is singing, but her song stops as the murdered man falls dead. Do I describe the scene truly?"

I had spoken excitedly. I had used gestures and words. Ceneri's ears had drunk in every syllable; his eyes had followed every gesture. As I pointed to the supposed position of Pauline, he had looked there with a quick, startled glance, as if expecting to see her enter the door. He made no attempt to deny the accuracy of my representation.

I waited for him to recover. He was looking ghastly. His breath came in spasmodic gasps. For a moment I feared he was about to die then and there. I poured out a glass of wine; he took it in his trembling hand and gulped it down.

"Tell me his name?" I repeated. "Tell me what he had to do with Pauline?"

Then he found his voice. "Why do you come here to ask me? Pauline could have told you. She must be well, or you could not have learned this."

"She has told me nothing."

"You are wrong. She must have told you. No one else saw the crime—the murder: for a murder it was."

"There was another present besides the actors I have named."

Ceneri started and looked at me.

"Yes, there was another; there by an accident. A man who could hear but not see. A man whose life I pleaded for as for my own."

"I thank you for having saved it."

"*You* thank me. Why should *you* thank me?"

"If you saved any one's life it was mine. I was that man."

"You that man!" He looked at me more attentively—"Yes; now the features come back to me. I always wondered that your face seemed so familiar. Yes. I can understand—I am a doctor—your eyes were operated upon?"

"Yes—most successfully."

"You can see well now—but then! I could not be mistaken, you were blind—you saw nothing."

"I saw nothing, but I heard every thing."

"And now Pauline has told you what happened?"

"Pauline has not spoken."

Ceneri rose, and in great agitation walked up and down the room, his chains rattling as he moved. "I knew it," he muttered, in Italian, "I knew it—such a crime cannot be hidden."

Then he turned to me. "Tell me how you have learned this? Teresa would die before she spoke. Petróff is dead—died, as I told you, raving mad."

From his last words I presumed that Petróff was th third man I had seen, and also the fellow-prisoner who had denounced Macari.

"Was it Macari—that double-dyed traitor? No—he was the murderer—such an avowal would defeat his ends. Tell me how you know?"

"I would tell you, but I suspect you would not believe me."

"Believe you!" he cried, excitedly. "I would believe anything connected with that night—it has never left my thoughts—Mr. Vaughan, the truth has come to me in my captivity. I am not condemned to this life for a political crime. My sentence is God's indirect vengeance for the deed you witnessed."

It was clear that Ceneri was not such a hardened ruffian as Macari. He, at least, had a conscience. Moreover, as he appeared to be superstitious, he would perhaps believe me when I told him how my accurate knowledge had been obtained.

"I will tell you," I said, "provided you pledge your honor to give me the full history of that fearful crime and answer my questions fully and truthfully."

He smiled bitterly. "You forget my position, Mr. Vaughan, when you speak of 'honor.' Yet I promise all you ask."

So I told him, as shortly and simply as I could, all that had occurred; all I had seen. He shuddered as I again described the terrible vision.

"Spare me," he said, "I know it all. Thousands of times I have seen it or have dreamed it—it will never leave me. But why come to me? Pauline, you say, is recovering her senses—she would have told you all."

"I would not ask her until I saw you. She is herself again, but I am a stranger to her—and unless your answer is the one I hope for, we shall never meet again."

"If anything I can do to atone—" he began, eagerly.

"You can only speak the truth. Listen. I taxed the murderer, your accomplice, with the crime. Like you he could not deny it, but he justified it."

"How—tell me!" panted Ceneri.

For a moment I paused. I fixed my eyes upon him to catch every change of feature—to read the truth in more than words.

"He vowed to me that the young man was killed by your instructions—that he was—Oh God, how can I repeat it!—the lover of Pauline, who having dishonored her, refused to repair his fault. The truth. Tell me the truth!"

I almost shouted the last words—my calmness vanished as I thought of the villain who had, with a mocking smile, coupled Pauline's name with shame.

Ceneri, on the other hand, grew calmer as he grasped the purport of my question. Bad as the man might be, even stained with innocent blood, I could have clasped him in my arms as I read in his wondering eyes the baselessness of the foul accusation.

"That young man—the boy struck down by Macari's dagger was Pauline's brother—my sister's child—Anthony March!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A TERRIBLE CONFESSION.

CENERI, having made this astounding announcement, threw his wasted arms across the rough table and laid his head upon them with a gesture of despair. I sat like one stupefied, repeating mechanically, "Pauline's brother — Anthony March!" Every vestige of the black lie was swept away from my mind; but the crime in which Ceneri had been concerned assumed more fearful proportions. It was more dreadful than I had suspected. The victim a near blood relation—his own sister's child! Nothing, I felt, could be urged to excuse or palliate the crime. Even had he not ordered and planned it he had been present; had assisted in hiding all traces of it; had been, until recently, on terms of friendship with the man who had struck the blow. I could scarcely control the loathing and contempt I felt for the abject wretch before me. My burning indignation would scarcely allow me to ask him, in intelligible speech, the object of the cruel deed. But for once and all I must have everything made clear to me.

I was spared the necessity of asking the question I was trying to force to my lips. The convict raised his head and looked at me with miserable eyes.

"You shrink from me. No wonder. Yet I am not so guilty as you think."

"Tell me all, first; the excuses may come afterwards, if anything can be urged in excuse of the crime."

I spoke as I felt—sternly and contemptuously.

"None can be urged for the murderer. For me, God knows I would willingly have let that bright boy live. He forsook and forgot his country, but that I forgave."

"His country! His father's country was England!"

"His mother's was Italy," replied Ceneri, almost fiercely. "He had our blood in his veins. His mother was a true Italian. She would have given fortune, life—ay, even honor, for Italy."

"No matter. Tell me the whole terrible story."

He told me. In justice to a penitent man, I do not use his own words in re-telling it. Without his accent and stress they would sound cold and unemotional. Criminal he had been, but not so utterly black as my fancy had painted him. His great fault was that in the cause of liberty any weapons were allowable, any crimes were pardonable. We Englishmen, whose idea of tyranny and oppression is being debarred from the exercise of the franchise, can neither understand nor sympathize, with a man of his type. We may call the government righteous or corrupt as we are Whigs or Tories, and one side happens to be in or out; but at least we are ruled by our countrymen, elected by some of us for that purpose. Let us be for years and years at the mercy of a foreigner, and we may understand what patriotism in Ceneri's sense means.

He and his sister were the children of respectable middle-class people—not noble as Macari asserted. He had been given a liberal education, and adopted the profession of a doctor. His sister, from whom Pauline inherited her great beauty, lived the life of an ordinary Italian girl—a duller life, perhaps, than many of them led, as, following her brother's example, she refused to share in gayeties whilst the white-coated foe ruled th land. No doubt she would have been faithful to he mourning for her country had not love come upon the scene. An Englishman named March saw the fair Italian girl, won her heart, wedded her and carried her away in triumph to his native land. Ceneri never quite forgave his sister for her desertion and defection; but the prospects opened before her by the marriage were so great that he made but little opposition to it. March was a very rich man. He was the only son of an only son, which fact accounts for Pauline having, so far as Ceneri knew, no near relatives on her father's side. For several years the young husband and his beautiful dark-eyed wife lived in great happiness. Two children, a son and a daughter, were born to them. When the son was twelve and the daughter ten years old the father died. The widow, who had made few close friends in England, and only loved the country for her husband's sake, flew back to her native land. She was cordially welcomed by her old friends. She was considered fabulously wealthy. Her husband, in the first flush of his passion, had made a will bequeathing everything he possessed to her absolutely. Although children had since come, so perfectly did he trust her that no change had been made as to the disposition of his property. So, with such a fortune at her command, Mrs. March was honored and courted by all.

She had, until she met her future husband, loved her brother above every one in the world. She had echoed his patriotism, sympathized with him in his schemes, and listened to the wild plots he was always planning. He was some years older than she was, and upon her return to Italy she found him, outwardly, nothing more than a quiet, hard-working, ill-paid doctor. She marvelled at the change from the headstrong, visionary daring young man she had left. It was not until he was certain her heart had not forsaken her country that Ceneri allowed her to see that under his prosaic exterior lurked one of the subtlest and ablest minds of all those engaged in working out the liberation of Italy. Then all his old sway came back. She admired, almost worshipped him. She, too, was ready to make any sacrifice when the time should come.

What she would have done had she been called upon, it is impossible to say; but there is little doubt but her fortune and her children's fortune would have been freely spent in the good cause. As it was, she died long before the pear was ripe, and when she died, such was her faith in her brother, every thing was left in his hands as sole trustee for her children. In her last moments, the thought of her husband's decided English proclivities made her exact a promise that both the boy and the girl should be given an English education.

Then she closed her eyes, and the orphans were left entirely to the trustee's mercy.

He obeyed her spoken commands to the letter. Anthony and Pauline were sent to English schools; but having no friends in their father's native land, or all old friends having been lost sight of during their mother's widowhood, the holidays were spent in Italy. They grew up almost as much Italian as English. Ceneri husbanded, invested and managed their fortune with care and in a business-like way. I have no doubt, so far as it went, his honesty was unimpeachable.

Then the longed-for moment came! The great blow was to be struck. Ceneri, who had kept himself out of little abortive plots, felt that now or never he must do all he could do for his country. He hailed the coming man. He knew that Garibaldi was to be the saviour of his oppressed land. The first rash step had been taken and led to success. The time and the man were at hand. Recruits were flocking by thousands to the scene of war, but the cry was "money, money, money!" Money for arms and ammunition—money for stores, food and clothing—money for bribes—money for every thing! Those who furnished the sinews of war would be the real liberators of their country!

Why should he hesitate? Had his sister lived she would have given all the fortune she possessed as freely as she would have given her life! Were not her children half Italian? Liberty laughed at such a small thing as breach of trust.

Except a few thousand pounds, he ruthlessly realized and sacrificed the whole of the children's inheritance. He poured their thousands and thousands into the hands held out for them. The large sum was spent where it was most wanted, and Ceneri averred that he freed Italy by the opportune aid. Perhaps he did—who can tell!

Titles and honors were afterwards offered him for this great though secret service. It makes me think better of the man that he refused all reward. His conscience may have told him he had not robbed himself. Any way, he remained plain Doctor Ceneri, and broke with his old leaders and friends when he found that Italy was to be a kingdom, not a republic.

He had kept, I said, a few thousand pounds. The boy and the girl were growing up and their uncle thought that even his patriotism permitted him to keep back enough to complete their education and start them in life. Pauline was promising to be so beautiful that he troubled little about her future. A rich husband would set every thing right for her. But Anthony—who was becoming a wild headstrong young fellow—was another affair.

As soon as the youth should reach man's estate, Ceneri had resolved to make a clean breast of his defalcations—to tell him how the money had been spent—to beg his forgiveness, and, if necessary, bear the penalty of his fraudulent act. But so long as any money remained he delayed doing so. The young man, if evincing no sympathy with his uncle's regeneration schemes and pursuit of liberty, fully believed in his integrity. Feeling assured that when he came of age he would succeed to a splendid inheritance, swelled by accumulated savings, he threw away money in a thousand and one extravagant ways, till Ceneri soon saw that the end of the reserve fund was drawing near.

So long as he had money in hand to meet Anthony's demands, he postponed the evil day of confession. The idea, which Macari had tried to work out with my aid, of appealing to the Italian Government for a return of some of the amounts expended, suggested itself to him; but to carry this out it would be necessary to let his nephew know what had taken place—the appeal must be made in his name.

As the inevitable exposure drew near he dreaded it more and more. He had studied Anthony's character, and felt sure that when he knew the truth his one wish would be to take revenge on the fraudulent trustee. Ceneri could see nothing before him but a well-deserved term of penal servitude. If the English law failed to touch him, that of his own country might be brought against him.

It seems to me that until this time he had committed no crime from which he could not absolve himself on the grounds of patriotism; but now the desire to save himself from punishment grew upon him, and he determined to avoid the consequences of his acts.

He had never felt any great affection for the two children. No doubt they had latterly appeared in the light of wronged innocents who would one day demand a reckoning with him. They were in disposition too much like their father for him to be greatly drawn towards them. He despised Anthony for his gay, frivolous life—a life without plans or ambition—and contrasted it with his own. He honestly believed he was doing good work in the world: that his plots and conspiracies quickened the steps of universal liberty. In his dark, secret circle he was a figure of considerable importance. If he was ruined and imprisoned he would be missed. Had he not the right to weigh his own high purposes against the butterfly existence of his nephew?

So he reasoned and persuaded himself that, for the sake of mankind, he might do almost anything to save himself.

Anthony March was now twenty-two. Trusting his uncle; careless and easy going; so long as his wants had been supplied he had accepted, until now, the excuses made for deferring the settlement of his affairs. Whether his suspicions had at last been awakened or not cannot be said; but recently he had taken another tone, and was insisting that his fortune should be at once placed in his hands. Ceneri, whose schemes called him for a time to England, pacified him by assuring him that he would, during his stay in London, explain everything.

The explanation must indeed be given now, as Anthony's last drafts had reduced the remnant of his father's wealth almost to nothing.

Now, as to Macari's part in the affair. He had been for years a useful and trusted agent of Ceneri's; but most probably without the latter's lofty and unselfish aims. He appears to have followed conspiracy as a trade by which money might be made. The fact, which seems beyond a doubt, that he fought bravely and distinguished himself on the battle-field, may be accounted for by the natural ferocity of the man's nature, which bade him fight for the sake of fighting.

Being mixed up in all his plots he was often at Ceneri's house, wherever for the time being it might be; and on many occasions saw Pauline. He fell in love with her when she was but a young girl, and tried everything he knew to win her heart. To her he was soft and kind. She had no reason to mistrust him, but she utterly refused to give him the love he asked for. The pursuit went on at intervals for years—the man, to give him his due, was constancy itself. Again and again Pauline assured him of the hopelessness of his suit, but after each rebuff he returned to the attack.

Ceneri gave him no encouragement. He did not wish to offend him, and seeing that the girl was proof against his blandishments, let things alone, hoping that Macari would grow weary of urging those requests which were always met by refusals. He believed that he was not seeking Pauline for the sake of the money which should have been hers. Macari knew what large sums Ceneri had poured into the patriots' treasury, and, no doubt, guessed whence they came.

Pauline remained at school until she was nearly eighteen ; then she spent two years with her uncle in Italy. It was a dull life for the girl, and she sighed audibly for England. Although meeting him seldom, she was passionately attached to her brother, and was greatly delighted when Ceneri told her that business would take him for a while to London, and that she might accompany him. She was growing tired of Macari's pertinacity, and, moreover, longed to see her brother again.

Ceneri, for the sake of receiving his many political friends at what hours of day or night he chose, took a furnished house for a short term. Pauline's disgust was great when she found that one of their first visitors was Macari. His presence was so indispensable to Ceneri that he took up his abode with them in Horace street. As old Teresa, the doctor's servant, accompanied the party and waited upon them, the change to Pauline was a very slight one.

Macari still persecuted the girl without success. At last, almost desperate, he formed the wild plan of trying to enlist her brother on his side. His idea was that Pauline's love for Anthony would induce her to yield to any wish he expressed. He was no particular friend of the young man's, but, having once rendered him a signal service, felt himself entitled to ask a favor at his hands. Knowing that both brother and sister were penniless he had less hesitation in so doing.

He called on Anthony and made his request. Anthony, who seems to have been a proud; arrogant and not a very pleasant young man, simply laughed at his impertinence and bade him begone. Poor boy, he little knew what that laugh would cost him!

It may have been the retort made by Macari, as he departed in a whirlwind of rage, that opened Anthony's eyes as to the jeopardy in which his fortune was placed. Any way he wrote at once to his uncle, insisting upon an immediate settlement. In the event of any delay he would consult a solicitor, and if necessary take criminal proceedings against the trustee.

The moment which Ceneri had so long dreaded—so long postponed—had come ; only now, the confession, instead of being as he intended a voluntary one, would be wrung from him.

Whether he would be amenable to the Italian or English law he did not know, but he felt certain that Anthony would at once take steps to insure his arrest and detention. The latter, if only temporary, would ruin the scheme upon which he was now engaged. At any cost Anthony March must be silenced for a time.

He assured me with the solemnity of a dying man that no thought of the dreadful means which effected this was in his mind. He had revolved many plans and finally settled on one which, although difficult to execute and very hazardous, seemed to give the best promise of success. His intention was, with the assistance of his friends and subordinates, to carry Anthony abroad and deposit him for some months in a lunatic asylum. The confinement was only to be temporary; yet, although Ceneri did not confess to it, I have little doubt but the young man would have been asked to buy his freedom by a promise to forgive the misappropriation of the trust money.

And now as to carrying this precious plan into execution. Macari, vowing vengeance for the words of insult, was ready to aid in every way. Petroff, the man with the scarred face, was the doctor's, body and soul. Teresa, the old servant, would have committed any crime at her master's command. The necessary papers could be obtained or forged. Let the conspirators get Anthony to visit them at the house in Horace street and he should leave it only as a lunatic in charge of his doctor and his keepers. It was a vile, treacherous scheme, the success of which was very doubtful, necessitating, as it must, carrying the victim to Italy. How this was to be done Cenari did not exactly explain—perhaps he had not quite worked out the details of the plot—perhaps the boy was to be drugged—perhaps he counted upon his frantic state when he discovered the true position of affairs to give color to the statement that he was of unsound mind.

The first thing was to induce Anthony to come to Horace street at an hour suitable for development of the plot. Ceneri made his preparations; gave his instructions to his confederates, and then wrote to his nephew begging him to call upon him that night and hear his explanation of matters.

Perhaps Anthony mistrusted his relative and his associates more than was suspected. Any way, he replied by declining the invitation, but suggested that his uncle should call upon him instead. Then, by Macari's advice, Pauline was made the innocent means of luring her brother to the fatal house. Ceneri expressed his perfect indifference as to where the meeting took place, but, being very much engaged, postponed it for a day or two. He then told Pauline that as business would keep him from home until the next night, it would be a good opportunity for her to spend some time with her brother—she had better ask him to come and see her during his absence. As he also wanted to see Anthony she must endeavor to keep him until his return.

Pauline, suspecting nothing, wrote to her brother, and, saying she should be all alone until late at night, begged him to come to her, or, if he would, take her to some place of amusement. They went to the theatre together, and it was twelve o'clock before he brought her back to Horace street. No doubt she begged him to remain with her awhile—perhaps against his will. Awful as the shock of what followed was to the girl it must have been doubly so when she knew that her entreaties had led him to his death.

The brother and sister sat alone for some time: then Ceneri and his two friends made their appearance. Anthony seemed displeased at the encounter, but made the best of matters and greeted his uncle civilly. Macari he simply turned his back upon.

It was no part of Ceneri's plan that any act of violence or restraint should take place in the presence of Pauline. Whatever was to be done should be done when Anthony was about to leave the house. Then he might be seized and conveyed to the cellar; his cries if needful being stifled. Pauline was to know nothing about it. Arrangements had been made for her to go on the morrow to a friend of her uncle's, with whom she was to stay, ignorant of the purport of the business which suddenly called the plotters away.

"Pauline," said Ceneri, "I think you had better go to bed. Anthony and I have some affairs to speak about."

"I will wait until Anthony leaves," she said, "but if you want to talk I will go into the other room."

So saying, she passed through the folding doors and went to the piano, where she sat playing and singing for her own amusement.

"It is too late to talk about business to-night," said Anthony, as his sister left the room.

"You had better take this opportunity. I find I must leave England to-morrow."

Anthony, having no wish to let his uncle escape without an explanation, reseated himself.

"Very well," he said; "but there is no need to hav strangers present."

"They are scarcely strangers. They are friends of mine, who will vouch for the truth of what I am going to say."

"I will not have my affairs talked about before a man like that," said Anthony, with a motion of contempt towards Macari.

The two men were conversing in a low tone. Pauline was not far off, and neither wished to alarm her by high words or by the appearance of a pending quarrel; but Macari heard the remark and saw the gesture. His eyes blazed and he leaned forward towards young March.

"It may be, in a few days," he said, "you will be willing enough to freely give me the gift you refused a short time ago."

Ceneri noticed that the speaker's right hand was inside the breast of his coat, but this being a favorite attitude of his, thought nothing of it.

Anthony did not condescend to reply. He turned from the man with a look of utter contempt—a look which, no doubt, drove Macari almost beside himself with rage.

"Before we talk about anything else," he said to his uncle, "I shall insist that from now Pauline is placed under my care. Neither she nor her fortune shall become the prey of a low-bred, beggarly Italian adventurer like this man, your friend."

These were the last words the poor boy ever spoke. Macari took one step towards him—he made no exclamation of rage—hissed out no oath which might warn his victim. Grasped in his right hand the long bright steel leaped from its lurking place, and as Anthony March looked up, and then threw himself back in his chair to avoid him, the blow was struck downwards with all the force of that strong arm—the point of the dagger entering just below the collar-bone and absolutely transfixing the heart. Anthony March was silenced for ever!

Then, even as he fell, Pauline's song stopped, and her cry of horror rang through the room. From her seat at the piano she could see what had happened. Is it any wonder that the sight bereft her of her senses?

Macari was standing over his victim. Ceneri was stupefied at the crime which in a moment had obviated any necessity for carrying out his wild plot. The only one who seemed in possession of his wits was Petróff. It was imperative that Pauline should be silenced. Her cries would alarm the neighbors. He rushed forward, and throwing a large woolen sofa-cover over her head, placed her on the couch, where he held her by force.

At that moment I made my frantic entrance—blind and helpless, but, for all they knew, a messenger of vengeance.

Even the ruthless Macari was staggered at my appearance. It was Ceneri who, following the instincts of self-preservation, drew a pistol and cocked it. It was he who understood the meaning of my passionate appeal to their mercy—he who, he averred, saved my life.

Macari, as soon as he recovered from his surprise, insisted that I should share Anthony March's fate. His dagger was once more raised to take human life, whilst Petróff, who had been forced by the new turn of affairs to leave Pauline, pinned me down where I had fallen. Ceneri struck the steel aside and saved me. He examined my eyes and vouched for the truth of my statement. There was no time for recriminations or accusations, but he swore that another murder should not be committed.

Petróff supported him, and Macari at last sullenly yielded, with the stipulation that I should be disposed of in the manner already related. Had the means been at hand I should have been drugged at once; as it was, the old servant, who as yet knew nothing of the tragedy which had taken place was roused up and sent out in search of the needful draught. The accomplices dared not let me leave their sight, so I was compelled to sit and listen to all their actions.

Why did Ceneri not denounce the murder? Why was he, at least, an accessory after the crime? I can only believe that he was a worse man than he confessed himself to be, or that he trembled at his share in the transaction. After all he had been planning a crime almost as black, and when the truth as to the trust money was known, no jury in the world would have acquitted him. Perhaps both he and Petróff held human life lightly; their hands were certainly not clean from political assassinations. Feeling that a trial must go hard with them, they threw their lot in with Macari's, and at once set about baffling inquiry and hiding all traces of the crime. From that moment there was little to choose between the degrees in criminality of the three men.

Now that they were all sailing in the same boat, they had little doubt of success. Teresa was perforce taken into their confidence. This was no matter, as devoted to Ceneri, she would have aided in a dozen murders had her master decreed them. First of all, they must get rid of me. Petróff—for Ceneri would not trust me in Macari's hands—went out and found a belated cab. For a handsome consideration the driver consented to lend it to him for an hour and a half. It was still night, so there was no difficulty in carrying my senseless form to it without observation.

Petróff drove off, and having deposited me in a byway a long distance from the house, returned the cab to its owner and rejoined his companions.

And now for Pauline. Her moans had gradually died away, and she lay in a death-like stupor. The great danger to the accomplices would be from her. Until she recovered nothing could be done save to carry her to her room and place her under Teresa's charge. When she awoke they must decide what course to pursue.

But the pressing thing was, how to make away with the dead body of the murdered man. All sorts of plans were discussed, until one at last was adopted, the very audacity of which no doubt made it a success. They were now growing desperate and prepared to risk much.

Early in the morning a letter was dispatched to Anthony's lodging, saying that Mr. March had been taken seriously ill the night before, and was at his uncle's. This served to stop any inquiry from that quarter. In the mean time the poor young fellow had been laid out as decently as possible, and with every thing that could be done to suggest a natural death. A doctor's certificate of death was then forged. Ceneri did not tell me how the form was obtained. The man he got it from knew nothing of its object. An undertaker then was ordered to send a coffin and deal case for the same the next night. The body, in Ceneri's presence, was simply placed inside it, with none of the usual paraphernalia, the reason given for such apparent indecency being that it was only a temporary arrangement, as it was to be taken abroad for interment. The undertaker marvelled, but being well paid, held his peace. Then, by the aid of the forged certificate, the proper formalities were complied with, and in two days' time the three men, in the garb of mourners, were travelling to Italy with the body of their victim. There was nothing to stop them, nothing suspicious in their manner or in the circumstances of the case. They actually took the coffin to the town where Anthony's mother died, and they buried the son by the side of the mother, with his name and the date of his death recorded on the stone. Then they felt safe from everybody except Pauline.

They were safe even from her. When she at last awoke from her stupor, even Teresa could see that something had gone wrong. She said nothing about the scene she had witnessed; she asked no questions. Her past had vanished. According to instructions given her, Teresa, as soon as possible, took her to join Ceneri in Italy, and he saw that Macari's crime had deprived the brother of life and the sister of reason.

No search or inquiry was made for Anthony March.

Carrying out his bold plan to the very letter, Ceneri instructed an agent to take possession of his few personal effects at his lodgings, and to inform the people there that he had died at his house and been taken to Italy to be buried with his mother. A few friends for a while regretted a companion, and there was an end of the affair. Nothing having been heard of the blind man, it was supposed he had been wise enough to keep his own counsel.

Months and months passed by, whilst Pauline remained in the same state. Teresa took charge of her, and lived with her in Turin until that time when I saw them at San Giovanni. Ceneri, who had no fixed home, saw little of the girl. His presence did not awaken any painful recollections in her mind, but to him the sight of his niece was unbearable. It recalled what he was eager to forget. She never seemed happy in Italy; in her uncertain way she was pining for England. Anxious to get her out of his sight, he had consented that Teresa should take her to London—had, in fact, come to Turin that particular day to arrange as to their departure. Macari, who, even with a brother's blood between them, considered her in some way his property, accompanied him. He had been continually urging Ceneri to let him marry her, even as she was now. He had threatened to carry her off by force. He had sworn she should be his. She remembered nothing—why should he not wed her?

Bad as Ceneri was, he had recoiled from this. He would even, had it been possible, have broken off all intercourse with Macari; but the men were too deep in each other's secrets to be divided on account of a crime, however atrocious; so he sent Pauline to England, where she was safe from Macari. Then came my proposal, the acceptance of which would take her, at my expense, entirely off his hands and out of his companion's way.

Hence our strange marriage, which even now he justified by saying that should the girl grow attached to any one, should any feeling corresponding to affection be awakened in her clouded mind—that mind would gradually be built up again.

This, not in his own words, was Ceneri's tale. I now knew all I wanted to know. Perhaps he had painted himself in better colors than he deserved; but he had given me the whole dark history freely and unreservedly, and in spite of the loathing and abhorrence with which he now inspired me, I felt that he had told me the truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOES SHE REMEMBER?

IT was time to bring our interview to an end. It had lasted so long that the civil captain had more than once peeped in with a significant look on his face, as much as to say there was such a thing as overstepping the limits of even such an authority as I held. I had no desire to protract the conversation with the convict. The object of my long journey had been attained. I had learned all that I could learn. I knew Pauline's history. The crime had been fully confessed. The man with me had no claim upon my consideration. Even had I felt inclined to help him I had no means of so doing. Why should I linger?

But I did linger for a while. The thought that my rising and giving the signal that my business was finished, would immediately consign the prisoner to that loathsome den from which he had emerged, was inexpressibly painful to me. Every moment I could keep him with me would be precious to him. Never again would he see the face of a friend or acquaintance.

He had ceased speaking. He sat with his head bent forward; his eyes resting on the ground. A tattered, haggard, hopeless wretch; so broken down that one dared not reproach him. I watched him in silence.

"Presently he spoke: "You can find no excuse for me, Mr. Vaughan?"

"None," I said. "It seems to me there is little to choose between you and your associates."

He rose wearily. "Pauline will recover, you think?" he asked.

"I think—I hope I shall find her almost well on my return."

"You will tell her how you have found me; she may be happier in knowing that Anthony's death has indirectly brought me to this."

I bowed assent to this dreary request.

"I must go back now," he said, with a kind of shiver, and dragging his weary limbs slowly towards the door

In spite of his sins I could not let the wretched being go without a word.

"Stop a moment," I said. "Tell me if there is any thing I can do to make your life any easier?"

He smiled faintly. "You may give me money—a little. I may be able to keep it and buy a few prisoners' luxuries."

I gave him several notes which he secreted on his person.

"Will you have more?" I asked. He shook his head. "I expect these will be stolen from me before I spend them."

"But is there no way of leaving money with any one for your use?"

"You might leave some with the captain. It may be, if he is kind-hearted and honest, a portion of it may reach me. But even that is doubtful."

I promised to do so, and knew that, whether it reached him or not, I should feel easier for having made the attempt.

"But what will your future be? Where are they taking you, and what will be your life?"

"They are taking us right to the end of Siberia—to Nertchinsk. There I shall be drafted off with others to work in the mines. We go all the way on foot and in chains."

"What an awful fate!"

Ceneri smiled. "After what I have passed through it is Paradise opening before me. When a man offends against the Russian law his one hope is that he may be sent at once to Siberia. That means going from hell to heaven."

"I do not understand."

"You would if you had lain like me for months, untried and uncondemned. If you had been placed in a cell without light, without air, without room to move. If you had heard those next to you screaming in their madness—madness brought on by solitary confinement and cruel treatment. If every morning as you awoke you had said, 'I too, shall be an idiot before nightfall.' If you had been frozen, beaten, starved, in order to make you betray your friends. If you had been reduced to such a state that your death warrant would be welcome; then, Mr. Vaughan, you would look forward to and long for the gentle rigors of Siberia. I swear to you, sir," he continued, with more fire and animation than he had yet displayed, "that if the civilized nations of Europe knew one-tenth part of the horrors and deeds in a Russian prison, they would say, 'guilty or innocent, no human beings shall be tormented like this,' and for the sake of common humanity would sweep the whole accursed government from the face of the earth!"

"But twenty years in the mines! Is there no hope of escaping?"

"Where could I escape to? Look at the map and see where Nertchinsk is. If I escaped I could only wander about the mountains until I died or until some of the savages around killed me. No, Mr. Vaughan, escapes from Siberia only occur in novels."

"Then you must slave until your death?"

"I hope not. I once gathered together much information respecting Siberian convicts, and, to tell you the truth, was rather disgusted to find how incorrect the common opinion is. Now I can only hope my researches showed me the truth."

"The treatment is not so bad, then?"

"It is bad enough, as you are always at the mercy of a petty tyrant. There is no doubt but for a year or two I must slave in the mines. If I survive the toil, which is very unlikely, I may, by finding favor in the ruler's eyes, be released from further work of that description. I may even be allowed to reside at some town and earn my living. I have great hopes that my professional skill may be of use to me. Doctors are scarce in Asiatic Russia."

Little as he deserved it, my heart echoed his wish; but as I looked at him, I felt sure there was small chance of his enduring even a year's toil at the mines.

The door opened and the captain once more looked in. He was growing quite impatient. I had no reason for wishing to prolong the conversation, so I told him I should have finished in a moment. He nodded his head and withdrew.

"If there is anything more I can do let me know," I said, turning to Ceneri.

"There is nothing—Stay! one thing. Macari, that villain—sooner or later he will get his deserts. I have suffered—so will he. When that time comes, will you try to send me word? It may be difficult to do so, and I have no right to ask the favor. But you have interest, and might get intelligence sent me. If I am not dead by then, it will make me happier."

Without waiting for my reply he walked hastily to the door, and with the sentry at his side was marched off to the prison. I followed him.

As the cumbrous lock was being turned he paused. "Farewell, Mr. Vaughan," he said. "If I have wronged you I entreat your pardon. We shall meet no more."

"So far as I am concerned I forgive you freely."

He hesitated a moment and then held out his hand. The door was now open. I could see the throng of repulsive, villanous faces—the faces of his fellow-prisoners. I could hear the jabber of curiosity and wonder. I could smell the foul odors coming from that reeking den crowded with filthy humanity. And in such a place as this, with such associates, a man of education, culture and refined tastes, was doomed to spend his last days. It was a fearful punishment!

Yet it was well merited. As he stood on the threshold with outstretched hand I felt this. To all intents and purposes the man was a murderer. Much moved as I was by his fate I could not bring myself to grasp his hand. My refusal may have been harsh, but I could not do it.

He saw that I did not respond to his action. A flush of shame passed over his face; he bowed his head and turned away. The soldier took him roughly by the arm and thrust him through the doorway. Then he turned, and his eyes met mine with an expression that haunted me for days. He was gazing thus when the heavy door was shut and hid him from my sight forever.

I turned away sick at heart, perhaps regretting I had added any thing to his shame and punishment. I sought my obliging friend, the captain, and received his word of honor that any money I left with him should be expended for the convict's benefit. I placed a considerable sum in his hands, and can only hope that a part of it reached its destination.

Then I found my interpreter, and ordered horses to be procured and the tarantass brought out. I would start without a moment's delay for England—and Pauline!

In half an hour all was ready. Ivan and I stepped into the carriage; the yemschik flourished his whip; the horses sprang forward; the bells jingled merrily, and away we went in the darkness, commencing the return journey which counted by thousands of miles. It was only now, when burning to find myself home again, that I realized the fearful distance which lay between me and my love.

A turn of the road soon hid the gloomy ostrog from my sight, but it was not until we were miles and miles away that my spirits recovered any thing like their former tone, and it was days before I ceased to think, at nearly every moment, of that terrible place in which I had found Ceneri, and to which I saw him again consigned after my business with him was finished.

As this is not a book of travel I will not recapitulate the journey. The weather nearly all the time was favorable, the roads were in good condition. My impatience forced me to travel almost day and night. I spared no expense; my extraordinary passport procured me horses when other travellers were compelled to wait—my large gratuities made those horses use their best speed. In thirty-five days we drove up to the Hotel Russia at Nijnei Novgorod, with the tarantass in such a dilapidated condition that in all probability another stage would have finished its work in this world. I bestowed it, a free gift, upon my guide, who, I believe, sold it immediately for three rubles.

From Nijnei by rail to Moscow; from Moscow to St. Petersburgh. I only tarried in the capital long enough to pay my respects to Lord ——, and once more thank him for his assistance: then, having collected what luggage I had left there, away for England!

On my road back from Irkutsk I found letters from Priscilla at Tomsk, at Tobolsk and at Perm, also more recently written ones at St. Petersburgh. All up to the date of the last was going on well. Priscilla had taken her charge to Devonshire. Having been reared in that county the old woman had a great belief in its virtues. They were at a quiet, but beautiful little watering-place on the north coast, and Priscilla averred that Pauline "was blooming as a rose, and seemed as sensible as Master Gilbert himself."

No wonder after hearing this good news I was eager to reach home—longing, not only to see my wife again, but to see her, as I had never yet seen her, with her mind restored. Would she remember me? How should we meet? Would she at last learn to love me? Were my troubles at an end or only begun? These were the questions which could only be answered when England was reached.

Home at last! How delightful to stand among one's own countrymen, and hear nothing but good intelligible English around me. I am bronzed with exposure to the wind and sun, my beard has grown to a great length;

one or two acquaintances I met when I reached London scarcely knew me. In my present trim I could not hope that I should awaken any recollections in Pauline's mind.

By the aid of a razor and fresh apparel I was soon converted to a fairly good semblance of my former self, and then without having apprized even Priscilla of my return, I started for the west, to see what was in store for me.

What is a run across England after a man has made such a journey as my recent one? Yet, that pitiful hundred and fifty miles seemed to me as long as a thousand did a month ago. The last few miles I had to go by coach, and although four splendid horses spun us along, each individual mile seemed as long as a Siberian stage. But the journey was at last ended, and, leaving my luggage in the coach office, I sallied forth, with a beating heart, to find Pauline.

I went to the address given in Priscilla's letter. The house was a quiet little building, nestling on a wooded bank, with a sloping garden in front, full of late summer flowers. Honeysuckle twined round the porch, great sunflowers stared fiercely from the beds, and carnations sweetened the air. As I waited for the door to be opened I had time to approve Priscilla's choice of a resting place.

I inquired for Mrs. Drew. She was not at home—had gone out with the young lady some time ago, and would not be back until the evening. I turned away and went in search of them.

It was early in autumn, but the leaf showed no signs of fading. Every thing was green, fresh and beautiful. The sky was cloudless, and a soft balmy air fanned my cheek. I paused and looked around me before I decided in which direction to go. Far below my feet lay the little fishing village; its houses clustered round the mouth of the noisy, brawling stream which ran down the valley, and leaped joyously into the sea. On either hand were great tors, and behind them inland hills covered with woods, and in front of me stretching away and away was the calm green sea. The scene was fair enough, but I turned away from it. I wanted Pauline.

It seemed to me that on such a day this, the shady woods and the running stream must offer irresistible attractions; so I found my way down the steep hill, and began walking up the riverside, whilst the merry stream danced past me, throwing its rich brown peat-stained waters into a thousand little cascades as it shot over and foamed round the great boulders which disputed its passage.

I followed its course for about a mile—now clambering over moss-grown rocks, now wading through ferns, now forcing my way through pliant hazel boughs—then in an open space on the opposite bank I saw a girl sitting sketching. Her back was towards me, but I knew every turn of that graceful figure well enough to feel sure she was my wife.

If I had needed extra assurance I had but to look at her companion, who sat near her and appeared to be dozing over a book. I should have recognized that shawl of Priscilla's a mile away—its like has never been known on earth.

Hard as I found it to do so, I resolved not to make my presence known to them. Before I met Pauline, I wanted to talk to Priscilla and be guided by her report as to my future method of proceeding. But in spite of my determination I yielded to the temptation of drawing nearer—from where I stood I could not see her face—so I crept on inch by inch till I was nearly opposite the sketcher, and, half hidden by the undergrowth, I stood watching her to my heart's content.

There was the hue of health upon her cheek—there was the appearance of health in every movement, and as she turned and spoke a few words to her companion, there was that in her look and in her smile which made my heart bound. The wife I returned to was a different being from the girl I had married.

She turned and looked across the stream. Carried away by my joy I had entirely emerged from my lurking place. With the river between us our eyes met.

She must in some way have remembered me. Were it but as in a dream my face must have seemed familiar to her. She dropped her pencil and sketch-book and sprang to her feet before Priscilla's exclamation of surprise and delight was heard. She stood looking at me as though she expected I would speak or come to her whilst the old servant was sending words of welcom across the noisy stream.

Had I wished to retreat, it was now too late. I found a crossing-place and in a minute or two was on the opposite bank.

Pauline had not moved, but Priscilla ran to meet me and almost shook my hands off.

"Does she remember—does she know me?" I whispered, as I disengaged myself and walked towards my wife.

"Not yet; but she will. I am sure she will, Master Gilbert."

Breathing a prayer that her prophecy might come true, I reached Pauline's side and held out my hand. She took it without hesitation, and raised her dark eyes to mine. How did I refrain from clasping her to my heart!

"Pauline, do you know me?"

She dropped her eyes. "Priscilla has talked of you. She tells me you are a friend and that until you came I must be content and ask no questions."

"But do you not remember me? I fancied you knew me just now."

She sighed. "I have seen you in dreams—strange dreams." As she spoke a bright blush spread over her cheek.

"Tell me the dreams," I said.

"I cannot. I have been ill, very ill, for a long time. I have forgotten much—every thing that happened."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Not now—not now," she cried eagerly. "Wait, and it may all come back."

Had she an inkling of the truth? Were the dreams she spoke of but the struggles of growing memory?

Did that bright ring which was still on her finger suggest to her what had happened? Yes, I would wait, and hope.

We walked back together, with Priscilla following at a proper distance. Pauline seemed to accept my society as though it was a perfectly natural thing to do. When the path was steep or rugged she held out her hand for mine, as though its support was her right. Yet for a long time she said nothing.

"Where have you come from?" she asked at last.

"From a long, long journey of many thousands of miles."

"Yes; when I saw your face you were always travelling. Did you find what you sought?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes. I found the truth. I know everything."

"Tell me where he is?"

"Where who is?"

"Anthony, my own brother—the boy they killed. Where is his grave?"

"He is buried by the side of his mother."

"Thank God! I shall be able to pray over him."

She spoke, if excitedly, quite sensibly, but I wondered she was not craving for justice to be meted out to the murderers.

"Do you wish for vengeance on those who killed him?"

"Vengeance! what good can vengeance do? It will not bring him back to life. It happened long ago. When, I know not; but now it seems years ago. God may have avenged him by now."

"He has, in a great measure. One died in a prison raving mad; another is in chains, working like a slave; the third, as yet, is unpunished."

"It will come to him, sooner or later. Which is it?"

"Macari."

She shuddered at the name and said no more. Just before we reached the house in which they lodged, she said, softly and beseechingly,—

"You will take me to Italy—to his grave?"

I promised, only too glad to find how instinctively she turned to me to prefer the request. She must remember more than she gave herself credit for.

"I will go there," she said, "and see the place, and then we will speak of the past no more."

We were now at the garden gate. I took her hand in mine.

"Pauline," I said, "try—try to remember me."

A ghost of the old puzzled look came into her eyes; she passed her disengaged hand over her forehead, and then, without a word, turned away and entered the house.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM GRIEF TO JOY.

MY tale is drawing to an end, although I could, for my own pleasure, write chapter after chapter, detailing every occurrence of the next month—describing every look, repeating every word that passed between Pauline and myself, but if I wrote them they would be sacred from all persons save two—my wife and myself.

If my situation was an anomalous one it had at least a certain charm. It was a new wooing, none the less entertaining and sweet because its object happened to be already my wife in name. It was like a landowner walking over his estate and in every direction finding unsuspected beauties and unknown mines of wealth. Every day showed me fresh charms in the woman I loved.

Her smile was a joy greater than I had ever pictured, her laugh a revelation. To gaze into those bright unclouded eyes and strive to learn their secrets was a reward that repaid me for all that I suffered. To find that her intellect, now restored, was fit to be matched with any one's—to know that when the time came I should be given not only a wife, beautiful in my eyes, above all women, but a companion and a sympathetic friend—how can I describe my rapture?

Yet it was a rapture not unmodified by doubts and fears. It may be that my character lacked that very useful trait called by some self-confidence and by others conceit. The more I saw to love and admire in Pauline, the more I asked myself how I could dare to expect that so peerless a creature would condescend to accept the love and the life I wished to offer her. Who was I to win her? I was rich, it is true, but I felt sure that riches would not buy her affection—besides, as I had not told her that her own wealth was swept away, she fancied her fortune was as large as my own. She was young, beautiful, and, so far as she knew, free and amply provided for. No, I had nothing to offer her which was worthy of her acceptance.

I quite dreaded to look forward to the moment which must sooner or later come—the moment when I must, ignoring the past, ask her once more to be my wife. On her answer would hang the whole of my future life. No wonder I decided to postpone the ordeal until I felt quite certain that the result of it would be favorable to me. No wonder that when with Pauline, and realizing the value of the prize I aimed at, I grew quite humble and depreciatory of what merits I may have possessed. No wonder that at times I wished that I were gifted with that pleasing assurance which sits so well on many men, and, time and opportunity being given, seems to go a long way towards winning a woman's heart.

Time and opportunity were at least not wanting in my case.

I had taken up my quarters near to her, and from morn to night we were in each other's company. We wandered through the narrow Devonshire lanes, with their luxuriant banks of ferns on either side. We climbed the rugged tors. We fished with more or less success the rapid streams. We drove together. We read and sketched—but as yet we had not talked of love; though all the while my wedding-ring was on her finger.

It required all my authority to prevent Priscilla telling Pauline the truth. On this point I was firm. Unless the past came back of its own accord, I would hear her say she loved me before my lips revealed it to her. Perhaps it was the idea which at times came to me, that Pauline remembered more than she would own to, kept me steadfast in this resolution.

It was curious the way in which she at once fell into friendly, unconstrained intercourse with me. We might have known each other from childhood, so perfectly natural and unembarrassed was her manner when we were together. She made no demur when I begged her to call me by my Christian name, nor did she object to my making use of her own. Had she done so I cannot think in what form I should have addressed her. Although I had instructed Priscilla to call her Miss March, the old woman stoutly objected to this and compounded matters by speaking to her and of her as Miss Pauline.

The days slipped by — the happiest days my life had as yet known. Morn, noon, and eve we were together; and I fear were objects of great curiosity to our neighbors, who no doubt wondered what relations existed between me and the beautiful girl at whose side I ever was.

I soon found that Pauline's natural disposition was gay and bright. It was too soon yet to expect it to reassert itself, yet I was not without hopes that before long that look, telling of sad memories, which so often crossed her face, would fade away forever. Now and again a pleased smile lit up her face, and merry words slipped from her lips. Although, when reason first returned to her, it seemed as if her brother's death had occurred but the day before, I felt sure that after a while, she understood that years had passed since the fatal night. These years were to her wrapped in a mist; they seemed as dreams. She was trying to recall them, beginning at the beginning; and I need not say with what alacrity I lent my aid.

By common consent we avoided the future; but of the past, or all the past in which I was not concerned, we spoke freely. All the events of her early years she now remembered perfectly; she could account for everything up to the time when her brother was struck down — after that came mistiness; from which she emerged to find herself in a strange room, ill, and being nursed by a strange nurse.

Several days passed before Pauline questioned me as to the part I had played in her clouded life. One evening we stood on the top of a thickly wooded hill, from which we could just catch a glimpse of the sea, now reddened by a glorious sunset. We had been silent for some time, and who can say that our thoughts were not more in unison than any words we could have spoken whilst our strange and uncertain relations continued. I looked at the western sky until the glowing tints began to fade, then turning to my companion I found her dark eyes gazing at me with almost painful earnestness.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me what I shall find when that lost time comes back to me?"

Her fingers, as she spoke, were playing with her wedding ring. She still wore it, and the diamond keeper I had placed above it; but she had not as yet asked me why it was on her hand.

"Will it come back, Pauline, do you think?" I asked.

"I hope so—or stay; should I hope so? Tell me, will it bring me joy or sorrow?"

"Who can say—the two are always mingled."

She sighed and turned her eyes to the ground. Presently she raised them to mine.

"Tell me," she said, "how and when did you come into my life—why did I dream of you?"

"You saw me so often when you were ill."

"Why did I wake and find your old servant taking care of me?"

"Your uncle gave you into my charge. I promised to watch over you during his absence."

"And he will never return. He is punished for his crime—for standing by when the poor boy was murdered."

She pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out the light.

"Pauline," I said, wishing to change the current of her thoughts, "tell me how you saw me in dreams; what you dreamed of me?"

She shuddered. "I dreamed that you were standing by me—in the very room—that you saw the deed. Yet I knew that it could not be so."

"And then?"

"I saw your face many times—it was always travelling, travelling through clouds. I saw your lips move, and you seemed to say, 'I am going to learn the truth' —so I waited patiently till you returned."

"You never dreamed of me before?"

It was growing dusk. I was uncertain whether it was the deepening shade from the trees which made her cheeks look darker, or whether it was a blush. My heart was beating madly.

"I cannot tell! I don't know. Don't ask me!" she said in a troubled voice. Then she turned.

"It grows dark and chilly. Let us go in."

I followed her. It was so completely the rule for me to spend the evening with her that I did not even wait for an invitation. It was our custom to play and sing together for an hour or two. Pauline's first expressed desire after her recovery had been for a piano. Believing herself to be an heiress she had felt no scruple in asking for all she wanted, and my instructions to Priscilla being that no money was to be spared in ministering to her comforts, a piano had been sent from the nearest town.

All her skill had returned to her. Her voice had come back even stronger and more sweet than of old. Again and again she held me entranced as she had held me once before, when I little expected the fearful ending to her song, or that my fate and the singer's were so closely interwoven.

I was surprised, therefore, when this evening she turned on the doorstep and said, "Not to-night. Leave me, please, for to-night."

I urged no objection. I took her hand and bade her farewell until the morrow. I would go and wander by starlight and think of her.

As we parted she looked at me strangely, almost solemnly.

"Gilbert," she said, speaking in Italian; for Priscilla was now standing at the open door—"shall I pray for the past to return or that I should never remember it? Which will be the best for me—and for you?"

Without waiting to hear my reply, she glided past Priscilla, who stood waiting for me to follow her.

"Good-night, Priscilla," I said, "I am not coming in."

"Not coming in, Master Gilbert! Miss Pauline will be vexed."

"She is tired and not quite well. You had better go to her. Good-night."

Priscilla came out to the doorstep and closed the door behind her. There was something in her manner which told me she meant on this particular occasion to resume what she could of that authority she had been delegated to exercise over me during my tender years—an authority I did not dare to dispute until long after I had been invested with jackets and trowsers. I have no doubt but she would have liked to seize me by the collar and given me a sound shaking. As it was she was obliged to content herself with throwing a world of sorrowful indignation into her voice.

"She may easily feel ill, poor young lady, when her husband lives at one house and she at another. And here's everybody round-about trying to find out what relation you are to each other—asking me all sorts of questions and I mustn't say you are husband and wife."

"No—not yet."

"Well, I'm going to, Master Gilbert. If you won't tell the poor young lady, I shall. I'll tell her how you brought her home and sent for me to take care of her—how you tended her and waited on her all day long—how you shut yourself up for her sake, never seeing an old friend's face. Oh, yes, Master Gilbert, I'll tell her all; and I'll tell her how you went into her room and kissed her ere you started on that fool's journey, wherever it was. She'll remember everything fast enough then."

"I command you to say nothing."

"I've heeded too many commands of yours, Master Gilbert, to mind breaking one for your sake. I'll do it, and take the consequences."

Feeling that the explanation, if made by Priscilla, would not only sweep away a great deal of romance, but also might precipitate matters and make them far more difficult to adjust to my own satisfaction, I was bound to prevent her carrying out her threat. Knowing from old experience that although the good soul could not be driven, she could be led, I was obliged to resort to cajolery. So I said, as one asking a boon—

"You won't if I entreat and beg you not to, my old friend. You love me too much to do anything against my wishes."

Priscilla was not proof against this appeal, but she urged me to proclaim the true state of affairs as soon as possible.

"And don't be too sure, Master Gilbert," she concluded, "as to what she remembers or doesn't. Sometimes I think she knows a deal more than you suppose."

Then she left me, and I went wandering about thinking as to what meaning to attach to Pauline's parting words.

"Which will be the best for me—and for you?"—to forget or to recall? How much did she forget—how much did she recall? Had those rings on her hand not shown her that she was a wife? Could she help suspecting whose wife she was? Even if she remembered nothing about our strange, hurried marriage, nothing about our subsequent life together, she found herself after that interval of oblivion, as it were, under my charge; found that I knew all the tragic circumstances of her brother's end, that I had now returned from a journey of thousands of miles, undertaken to learn the fatal particulars. Although she might not be able to account for it, she must by this time know the truth.

Keeping the ring on her finger showed that she did not dispute the fact that, somehow, she was wedded. Who could be her husband save me?

Yes, by the evidence the situation offered, I determined that she had arrived at the right conclusion; and the hour was at hand when I should learn if the knowledge would bring her joy or sorrow.

To-morrow I would tell her all. I would tell her how strangely our lives became linked. I would plead for her love more passionately than ever man yet pleaded. I would prove to her how innocently I had fallen into Ceneri's schemes—how free from blame I was in wedding her whilst her mental state was such that she was unable to refuse consent. All this she should learn, and then I would hear my doom from her lips.

I would urge no plea based upon my legal right to my wife. So far as I could make her she should be free. Nothing should bind her to me except love. If she had none to give me I would tear myself from her, and at her wish see if steps could not be taken to annul the marriage—but whether she elected to remain my wife in name, to become my wife in reality, or to sever every tie, her future life, with or without her knowledge, should be my care. By this time to-morrow my fate should be known.

Having settled this I should have retired to rest; but I was in no mood for sleep. Again and again I recalled her last words and commenced one of those weighings of hopes and fears which always means self-torture. Why, if Pauline had guessed the truth, had she not asked me about it? How could she spend hour after hour with me, knowing she was my wife, yet not knowing how she became so? Would her words admit of the interpretation that she dreaded what she had to learn? Did she wish for freedom and continual forgetfulness? So on and on until I made myself quite miserable.

Many a man on the eve of learning whether his love is to be accepted or rejected has been racked as I was that night, but surely no lover save myself ever lived who was to receive the momentous answer from the lips of a woman who was already his wife.

The hour was late when I returned from my solitary walk. I passed Pauline's window, and standing gazing up at it I wondered if she, too, were lying awake and thinking and deciding about our future lives. Ah well, to-morrow would put us both out of suspense!

The night being still warm her window was open at the top. Before I turned away a fancy seized me. I picked a rose from a bush in the garden and managed to toss it through the open sash. She might find it in the morning and guessing from whom it came might wear it. It would be a good omen.

The blind shivered as the rosebud struck it: then, fearing discovery, I turned and fled.

The morning broke fair. I rose with hope in my heart and scouted the fears of the night. At the earliest moment I could hope to find her I started in search of Pauline. She had just gone out. I ascertained in which way, and followed her.

I found her walking slowly, with her head bent. She greeted me with her usual quiet sweetness, and we walked on side by side. I looked in vain for my rose; and was fain to comfort myself by thinking it must have fallen where she could not see it. Nevertheless, I was troubled.

And there was worse in store for me. Her hands, ungloved and with the fingers interlaced, were carried in front of her. I was walking on her left side, and I saw that the hand nearest me was denuded of its rings. The golden circlet which had shone until now like a beacon of hope, had disappeared. My heart sank. The meaning was only too clear: when coupled with her words of last night, who could fail to understand it? Although she knew herself to be my wife she wished to throw the yoke aside. Pauline loved me not—the truth which was gradually creeping from the misty past would bring her sorrow—now that she remembered, she wished to forget. The rings were cast aside to show me, if possible, without words, that she was not to be my wife.

How could I speak now? The answer had been given before the question had been put.

She saw me looking at that little white hand of hers, but simply dropped her lashes and said nothing. No doubt she wished me to spare her the pain of an explanation. If I could nerve myself to it, perhaps the best thing would be to leave her as speedily as possible—leave her to return no more.

Moody and despondent as I felt at the discovery just made, it was not long before I found a great change in Pauline's manner. She was not the same. Something had come between us, something which entirely dispelled the old friendly intercourse; changing it into little more than conventional politeness. Shyness and restraint now made themselves manifest in every word and action—perhaps, in mine also. We spent the day together as usual, but the companionship must have been irksome to both, so greatly was its footing changed for the worse. That night I went to bed wretched. The prize I had striven for seemed to be snatched away just as I had hoped to win it!

So several days passed. Pauline made no sign, or certainly none that I could construe favorably. I could bear this state of things no longer. Priscilla, whose sharp eyes saw that something was amiss, pestered me beyond endurance; and spoke her mind so roundly that I began to suspect she had already executed her threat of telling Pauline everything; and I felt inclined to attribute my failure to the old woman's officiousness in making a premature revelation. All might have gone well had I been given another week or a fortnight to win my wife's heart. I began to believe that she was growing unhappy; that my presence troubled her. Not that she evinced any wish to avoid me; indeed she came so surely at my beck and call as to suggest a shadow of the obedience she had always given during those days upon which I now dreaded to dwell. But I felt she would be happier and more at ease in my absence. So I resolved to depart.

I knew that my only way was to carry out my determination at once. Having made the resolve I would act upon it next day. I packed up my things in readiness. I arranged by which coach to go. I should have three hours in the morning to give Priscilla my final instructions and to bid my wife adieu forever.

I could not go without explaining some things to her. I need not pain her by alluding to our relationship, but I must inform her that she was not the heiress she believed. I must tell her she had plenty to live upon without saying that I, her husband, would supply it. When this was arranged, farewell forever!

As soon as I had finished my pretense at a breakfast, I walked across to the house where Pauline lodged. As yet she knew nothing of my purpose. I held her hand rather longer than usual, and by a desperate effort forced words to my lips.

"I am come to say good-by. I go to London today."

She answered not a word, but I felt her hand tremble in my own. Her eyes I could not see.

"Yes, I have loitered here long enough," I continued, attempting to speak easily, "a great many things call me to town."

Pauline was not looking in the best of health this morning. Her cheek was paler than it had been since my arrival. She looked languid and depressed. Doubtless my presence had worried her. Poor girl, she would soon be relieved of that!

Seeing that I paused for her to speak she found her voice, but even that seemed to have lost some of its freshness and tone.

"When do you go?" was all that she said. Not a word about my return!

"By the mid-day coach. I have still some hours left. As it is the last time, shall we walk to the Clearing together?"

"Do you wish it?"

"If you have no objection. Besides I want to speak to you about yourself—about business matters," I added, to show that she need not fear the interview.

"I will come," she said, quitting the room hurriedly. I waited. Presently Priscilla appeared. She was looking daggers at me—undeserved, at least from her. Her voice was harsh and raspy, bringing back to my mind a familiar sound of early childhood, when I had committed some petty crime which excited her ire.

"Miss Pauline begs you will walk on and not wait for her. She will join you at the Clearing presently."

I took my hat and prepared to do as commanded. Priscilla had said nothing which showed she knew of my approaching departure, but as I was passing out of the house she said, in a tone of withering scorn,

"Master Gilbert, you're a bigger fool than I thought you were."

Such an observation, even from an old servant, could not be passed by. I turned to remonstrate. Priscilla simply slammed the door almost against my nose.

I walked away—the thing in the face of my other troubles was not worth a thought. Of course I could not expect Priscilla to enter into my feelings and appreciate the delicacy of my position. Besides, I must see her and have a long talk with her before I left.

The Clearing, as we called it, was a place on the hill side, not far away. We had stumbled upon it, almost by accident, during our walks. A seldom trodden path through the wood led to a spot from which the trees and undergrowth had been cleared. From it there was a delightful view of the opposite hills and the stream winding through the valley. It was a favorite resort of mine. Here I had sat for hours talking to Pauline, and here in my dreams I had poured forth the words of love I longed to speak—and here I was to say good-by forever!

My frame of mind was a sad one when I reached the Clearing. I threw myself down on the sloping ground and turned my eyes up the path by which she must come. A fallen trunk at my back formed a rest for my head—the trees around were rustling in the soft breeze—the monotonous rush of the stream below was soothing and lulling—a few white clouds sailed slowly across the sky. It was a drowsy, dreamy, beautiful morning. I had scarcely slept for the last two or three nights. Pauline lingered. Is it any wonder that my eyes closed and for a while all sorrow and disappointment were chased away by the sleep I so sorely needed?

Was it sleep? Yes, because one must sleep in order to dream. Ah! if that dream were reality, life would be worth having. I dreamed that my wife was beside me, that she took my hand and pressed her lips to it passionately, that her cheek was almost touching mine, that I could feel her soft, sweet breath. So real did it seem that I turned on my hard rustic pillow towards the dream, and then of course it vanished.

I opened my eyes. In front of me stood Pauline. Those grand dark eyes of hers no longer vailed by the lashes, but open and looking into mine. I saw them but for a second, but that was long enough for the look I had surprised to send the blood throbbing through my veins—to make me spring to my feet—to embolden me to take her suddenly and swiftly in my arms—to cover her sweet face with kisses, ejaculating the only words that one can find at such a time, "I love you! I love you! I love you!"

For no man yet has seen in a woman's eyes the look I saw in Pauline's unless that woman loves him above all the world.

No words can describe the rapture of that moment—the revulsion of my feelings. She was mine, my own forever. I knew it; I could feel it every time my lips touched hers. The bright blush which spread from her cheek to her neck proclaimed it—her suffering without resistance my passionate caresses confirmed it—but let me hear it from those sweet lips!

"Pauline! Pauline!" I cried, "do you love me?"

A trembling which I knew was of joy passed over her.

"Do I love you! love you!" she said, and hid her blushing face on my shoulder. The words, the action, was enough, but presently she raised her head and pressed her lips to mine.

"I love you—yes, I love you, my husband!"

"When did you know? When did you remember?"

For a moment she answered not. She broke from my embrace; then, opening the bosom of her dress, drew forth a blue ribbon which hung round her neck. Upon it were threaded the two rings. They seemed to sparkle with joy in the bright sun.

She detached them and held them towards me. "Gilbert, my love, my husband, if you will that I shall be your wife, if you think me worthy of it, take them and place them where they should be."

And then once more, with many a kiss, many a vow, I placed the rings upon her finger and knew that my troubles were at an end.

"But when did you know—when did the memory come back?"

"Dearest," she whispered, and her voice sounded like music, "I knew it when I saw you standing on the river bank. It came to me all at once. Till then all was dark. I saw your face and knew every thing."

"Why did you not tell me?"

She hung her head. "I wanted to find out if you loved me. Why should you do so? If you did not we could part, and I would set you free if possible. But not now, Gilbert; you will never get rid of me now."

Her thoughts had been the same as mine. No wonder I had misunderstood her. The idea of her waiting to see if I loved her seemed so preposterous!

"You would have saved me days of grief if I had known you cared for me. Why did you take off the rings, Pauline?"

"Day after day passed and you said nothing. Then I took them off. They have been next my heart ever since, waiting for you to give back when you chose."

I kissed the hand on which they shone. "Then all is clear to you now, my own wife?"

"Not quite all, but enough. The truth, the love, the devotion—all this, my husband, I can remember—all this I will repay, if my love can do it."

Our wooing may close with these words—let all the rest be sacred. The trees around alone know what passed between us, as their kindly shade fell on us where we sat and interchanged our words of love whilst hour after hour of our second and real wedding day slipped by. At last we rose, but lingered yet awhile, as though loth to leave the spot where happiness had come to us. We looked round once more and bid farewell to hill and valley and stream; we gazed long in each other's eyes, our lips met again in a passionate kiss; then we went forth together to the world and the new sweet life awaiting us.

We walked as in a dream, from which we were only recalled by the sight of houses and people.

"Pauline!" I whispered, "can you leave this place to-night? We will go to London."

"And afterwards?" she asked, wistfully.

"Can you ask me? To Italy, of course."

She thanked me with a look and pressure of the hand. We were now at her home. She left me, passing Priscilla, whose honest eyes were glowering at me. Priscilla had called me a fool; I must be revenged.

"Priscilla," I said gravely, "I am going by this evening's coach. I will write when I get to London."

I had my revenge in full. The good old soul almost fell weeping at my feet.

"Oh, Master Gilbert, don'tee, don'tee go, sir. That poor young lady, Miss Pauline, what will she do? She loves the very ground you tread upon."

I had bargained for reproaches, not sentiment of this kind. I laid my hand upon her shoulder.

"But, Priscilla, Miss Pauline—Mrs. Vaughan, my wife, goes with me."

Priscilla's tears came more copiously than before, but they were tears of joy.

Ten days later and Pauline stood beside her brother's grave. By her own wish she visited it alone. I waited at the gate of the cemetery until she rejoined me. Her face was very pale, her eyes showed traces of many tears, but she smiled as she met my anxious glance.

"Gilbert, my husband," she said, "I have wept, but now I smile. The past is past. Let its darkness be dispersed by the brightness of the present and the promise of the future. Let the love I bore my brother be carried into the greater love I give my husband. Let us turn our backs on the dark shadows and begin our lives."

Have I more to tell? One thing only.

Years afterwards I was in Paris. The great war had been fought out to the bitter end. Traces of the conflict between the two races had almost vanished, but those of the second and internecine contest were visible everywhere. The Gaul himself had destroyed what the Teuton spared. The Tuileries, with sightless, empty eyes, gazed sadly towards the Place de la Concord, where stood the statues of the fair lost provinces. The Vendôme column lay prostrate. The fair city was charred and blackened by the incendiary torches of her own sons; but the flames had been some time extinguished and ample revenge had been taken. A gay young officer, a friend of mine, took me to see a military prison. We were chatting and smoking in the open air when a small body of soldiers appeared. They were escorting three men, who walked with fettered hands and bowed heads.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Blackguard Communists."

"Where are they taking them?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "Where they ought all to be taken—to be shot, the brutes!"

Brutes or not, three men who have but a minute to live must be objects of interest if not sympathy. I looked closely at them as they passed us. One of them raised his head and stared me in the face. It was Macari!

I started as his eyes met mine, but I am not ashamed to say the movement was caused by no feeling of compassion. Ceneri, in spite of myself, I pitied, and would have aided had it been possible, but this ruffian, liar and traitor should have gone to his doom, even if I could have saved him by lifting a finger. He had passed long ago out of my life, but my blood still boiled when I thought of him and his crimes. I knew not how he had lived since I last saw him—knew not whom or how many he had betrayed; but if Justice had been slow in claiming him, her sword had at last reached him and his end was close at hand.

He knew me—perhaps he thought I had come there to gloat over his punishment. A look of bitter hate crossed his face. He stopped and cursed me. The guard forced him on. He turned his head and cursed me until one of the soldiers smote him on the mouth. The action may have been cruel, but there was little mercy shown to Communists in those days. The guard and their prisoners turned round an angle of the building.

"Shall we see the end?" said my friend, flipping the ash off his cigar.

"No, thank you."

But we heard it. In ten minutes the rattle of rifles sounded, and I knew that the last and guiltiest of Anthony March's murderers had found his deserts.

I remembered my promise to Ceneri. With great trouble I managed to get a message sent which I believed would reach him. Six months afterwards a letter stamped with innumerable hieroglyphical postmarks, was delivered to me. It told me that the prisoner to whom I had written had died two years after his arrival at the mines. So the lesser criminal had not the satisfaction of knowing the fate of the man who had betrayed him.

My tale is told. My life and Pauline's began when we turned from that cemetery and resolved to forget the past. Since then our joys and griefs have been the same as those of thousands. As I write this in my happy country house, blessed with wife and children, I wonder if I could ever have been that blind man who heard those fearful sounds and who saw afterwards that terrible sight. Could it have been I who rushed from one end of Europe to the other to set at rest a doubt which I blush at even harboring? Could it have been Pauline, whose eyes now shine with love and intelligence, who lay for months, even years, with the sweet bells of her intellect jangled and out of tune?

Yes, it must have been so; for she has read every line I have written, and as we peruse and revise this last page her arm steals round me, and she says, insisting that I shall record her utterance,

"Too much, too much of me, my husband, not enough of what you did and have always done for me!"

With this, the only difference of opinion that exists between us, my tale may end.

DARK DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

A PRAYER AND A VOW.

WHEN this story of my life, or of such portions of my life as present any out-of-the-common features, is read, it will be found that I have committed errors of judgment—that I have sinned not only socially, but also against the law of the land. In excuse I can plead but two things—the strength of love; the weakness of human nature.

If these carry no weight with you, throw the book aside. You are too good for me; I am too human for you. We cannot be friends. Read no further.

I need say nothing about my childhood; nothing about my boyhood. Let me hurry on to early manhood; to that time when the wonderful dreams of youth begin to leave one; when the impulse which can drive sober reason aside must be, indeed, a strong one; when one has learned to count the cost of every rash step; when the transient and fitful flames of the boy have settled down to a steady, glowing fire which will burn until only ashes are left; when the strength, the nerve, the intellect, is or should be at its height; when, in short, one's years number thirty.

Yet what was I then? A soured, morose, disappointed man; without ambition, without care for the morrow; without a goal or object in life. Breathing, eating, drinking, as by instinct. Rising in the morning, and wishing the day were over; lying down at night, and caring little whether the listless eyes I closed might open again or not.

And why? Ah! to know why you must sit with me as I sit lonely over my glowing fire one winter night. You must read my thoughts; the pictures of my past must rise before you as they rise before me. My sorrow, my hate, my love must be yours. You must, indeed, be my very self.

You may begin this retrospect with triumph. You may go back to the day when, after having passed my examination with high honors, I, Basil North, was duly entitled to write M.D. after my name, and to set to work to win fame and fortune by doing my best toward relieving the sufferings of my fellow-creatures. You may say as I said then, as I say now, "A noble career; a life full of interest and usefulness."

You may see me full of hope and courage, and ready for any amount of hard work; settling down in a large provincial town, resolved to beat out a practice for myself. You may see how, after the usual initiatory struggles, my footing gradually grew firmer; how my name became familiar; how, at last, I seemed to be in a fair way of winning success.

You may see how for a while a dream brightened my life; how that dream faded, and left gloom in its place. You may see the woman I loved.

No, I am wrong. Her you cannot see. Only I myself can see Philippa as I saw her then—as I see her now. Heavens! how fair she was! How glorious her rich dark beauty! How different from the pink-white and yellow dolls whom I have seen exalted as the types of perfection! Warm Southern blood ran through her veins and tinged her clear brown cheek with color. Her mother was an Englishwoman; but it was Spain that gave her daughter that exquisite grace, those wondrous dark eyes and long curled lashes, that mass of soft black hair, that passionate impulsive nature, and, perhaps, that queen-like carriage and dignity. The English mother may have given the girl many good gifts, but her beauty came from the father, whom she had never known; the Andalusian, who died while she was but a child in arms.

Yet, in spite of her foreign grace, Philippa was English. Her Spanish origin was to her but a tradition. Her foot had never touched her father's native land. Its language was strange to her. She was born in England, and her father, the nature of whose occupation I have not been able to ascertain, seems to have spent most of his time in this country.

When did I learn to love her? Ask me rather, When did we first meet? Even then, as my eyes fell upon the girl, I knew, as by revelation, that for me life and her love meant one and the same thing. Till that moment there was no woman in the world the sight of whom would have quickened my pulse by a beat. I had read and heard of such love as this. I had laughed at it. There seemed no room for such an engrossing passion in my busy life. Yet all at once I loved as man has never loved before; and as I sit to-night and gaze into the fire I tell myself that the objectless life I am leading is the only one possible for the man who loved but failed to win Philippa.

Our first meeting was brought about in a most prosaic way. Her mother, who suffered from a chronic disease, consulted me professionally. My visits, at first those of a doctor, soon became those of a friend, and I was free to woo the girl to the best of my ability.

Philippa and her mother lived in a small house on the outskirts of the town. They were not rich people, but had enough to keep the pinch of poverty from their lives. The mother was a sweet, quiet, lady-like woman, who bore her sufferings with resignation. Her health was, indeed, wretched. The only thing which seemed likely to benefit her was continual change of air and scene. After attending her for about six months, I was in conscience bound to indorse the opinion of her former medical advisers, and tell her it would be well for her to try another change.

My heart was heavy as I gave this advice. If adopted, it meant that Philippa and I must part.

But why, during those six months, had I not, passionately in love as I was, won the girl's heart? Why did she not leave me as my affianced bride? Why did I let her leave me at all?

The answer is short. She loved me not.

Not that she had ever told me so in words. I had never asked her in words for her love. But she must have known—she must have known! When I was with her, every look, every action of mine must have told her the truth. Women are not fools or blind. A man who, loving as I did, can conceal the true state of his feelings must be more than mortal.

I had not spoken; I dared not speak. Better uncertainty with hope, than certainty with despair. The day on which Philippa refused my love would be as the day of death to me.

Besides, what had I to offer her? Although succeeding fairly well for a beginner, at present I could only ask the woman I made my wife to share comparative poverty. And Philippa! Ah! I would have wrapped Philippa in luxury! All that wealth could buy ought to be hers. Had you seen her in the glory of her fresh young beauty, you would have smiled at the presumption of the man who could expect such a being to become the wife of a hard-working and as yet ill-paid doctor. You would have felt that she should have had the world at her feet.

Had I thought that she loved me, I might perhaps have dared to hope she would even then have been happy as my wife. But she did not love me. Moreover, she was ambitious.

She knew—small blame to her—how beautiful she was. Do I wrong her when I say that in those days she looked for the gifts of rank and riches from the man who loved her? She knew that she was a queen among women, and expected a queen's dues.

(Sweetest, are my words cruel? They are the cruelest I have spoken, or shall speak, against you. Forgive them!)

We were friends—great friends. Such friendship is love's bane. It buoys false hopes; it lulls to security; it leads astray; it is a staff which breaks suddenly, and wounds the hand which leans upon it. So little it seems to need to make friendship grow into love; and yet how seldom that little is added! The love which begins with hate or dislike is often luckier than that which begins with friendship. Lovers cannot be friends.

Philippa and her mother left my neighborhood, then went to London for a while. I heard from them occasionally, and once or twice, when in town, called upon them. Time went by. I worked hard at my profession the while, striving, by sheer toil, to drive away the dream from my life. Alas! I strove in vain. To love Philippa was to love her forever!

One morning a letter came from her. I tore it open. The news it contained was grievous. Her mother had died suddenly. Philippa was alone in the world. So far as I knew, she had not a relation left; and I believed, perhaps hoped, that, save myself, she had no friend.

I needed no time for consideration. That afternoon I was in London. If I could not comfort her in her great sorrow, I could at least sympathize with her, could undertake the management of the many business details which are attendant upon a death.

Poor Philippa! She was glad to see me. Through her tears she flashed me a look of gratitude. I did all I could for her, and stayed in town until the funeral was over. Then I was obliged to think of going home. What was to become of the girl?

Kith or kin she had none, nor did she mention the name of any friend who would be willing to receive her. As I suspected, she was absolutely alone in the world. As soon as my back was turned she would have no one on whom she could count for sympathy or help.

It must have been her utter loneliness which urged me, in spite of my better judgment, in spite of the grief which still oppressed her, to throw myself at her feet and declare the desire of my heart. My words I cannot recall, but I think—I know I pleaded eloquently. Such passion as mine gives power and intensity to the most unpractised speaker. Yet long before my appeal was ended I knew that I pleaded in vain. Her eyes, her manner, told me she loved me not.

Then, remembering her present helpless condition, I checked myself. I begged her to forget the words I had spoken; not to answer them now; to let me say them again in some months' time. Let me still be her friend, and render her such service as I could.

She shook her head; she held out her hand. The first action meant the refusal of my love; the second, the acceptance of my friendship. I schooled myself to calmness, and we discussed her plans for the future.

She was lodging in a house in a quiet, respectable street near Regent's Park. She expressed her intention of staying on here for a while.

"But alone!" I exclaimed.

"Why not? What have I to fear? Still, I am open to reason, if you can suggest another plan."

I could suggest no other. Philippa was past twenty-one and would at once succeed to whatever money had been her mother's. This was enough to live upon. She had no friends, and must live somewhere.. Why should she not stay on at her present lodgings? Nevertheless, I trembled as I thought of this beautiful girl all alone in London. Why could she not love me? Why could she not be my wife? It needed all my self-restraint to keep me from breaking afresh into passionate appeals.

As she would not give me the right to dispose of her future, I could no nothing more. I bade her a sad farewell, then went back to my home to conquer my unhappy love, or to suffer from its fresh inroads.

Conquer it! Such love as mine is never conquered. It is a man's life. Philippa was never absent from my thoughts. Let my frame of mind be gay or grave, Philippa was always present.

Now and then she wrote to me, but her letters told me little as to her mode of life; they were short friendly epistles, and gave me little hope.

Yet I was not quite hopeless. I felt that I had been too hasty in asking her for her love so soon after her mother's death. Let her recover from the shock, then I will try again. Three months was the time which in my own mind I resolved should elapse before I again approached her with words of love. Three months! How wearily they dragged themselves away!

Toward the end of my self-imposed term of probation I fancied that a brighter, gayer tone manifested itself in Philippa's letters. Fool that I was! I augured well from this.

Telling myself that such love as mine must win in the end, I went to London, and once more saw Philippa. She received me kindly. Although her garb was still that of deep mourning, never, I thought, had she looked more beautiful. Not long after our first greeting did I wait before I began to plead again. She stopped me at the outset.

"Hush," she said; "I have forgotten your former words; let us still be friends."

"Never!" I cried passionately. "Philippa, answer me once for all, tell me you can love me!"

She looked at me compassionately. "How can I best answer you?" she said, musingly. "The sharpest remedy is perhaps the kindest. Basil, will you understand me when I say it is too late?"

"Too late! What can you mean? Has another—"

The words died on my lips as Philippa, drawing a ring from the fourth finger of her left hand, showed me that it concealed a plain gold circlet. Her eyes met mine imploringly.

"I should have told you before," she said softly, and bending her proud head; "but there were reasons—even now I am pledged to tell no one. Basil, I only show you this, because I know you will take no other answer."

I rose without a word. The room seemed whirling around me. The only thing which was clear to my sight was that cursed gold band on the fair white hand—that symbol of possession by another! In that moment hope and all the sweetness of life seemed swept away from me.

Something in my face must have told her how her news affected me. She came to me and laid her hand upon my arm. I trembled like a leaf beneath her touch. She looked beseechingly into my face.

"Oh, not like that!" she cried. "Basil, I am not worth it. I should not have made you happy. You will forget—you will find another. If I have wronged or misled you, say you forgive me. Let me hear you, my true friend, wish me happiness."

I strove to force my dry lips to frame some conventional phrase. In vain! words would not come. I sank into a chair and covered my face with my hands.

The door opened suddenly, and a man entered. He may have been about forty years of age. He was tall and remarkably handsome. He was dressed with scrupulous care; but there was something written on his face which told me it was not the face of a good man. As I rose from my chair he glanced from me to Philippa with an air of suspicious inquiry.

"Doctor North, an old friend of my mother's and mine," she said with composure. "Mr. Farmer," she added; and a rosy blush crept round her neck as she indicated the new-comer by the name which I felt sure was now also her own.

I bowed mechanically. I made a few disjointed remarks about the weather and kindred topics; then I shook hands with Philippa and left the house, the most miserable man in England.

Philippa married, and married secretly! How could her pride have stooped to a clandestine union? What manner of man was he who had won her? Heavens! he must be hard to please if he cared not to show his conquest to the light of day. Cur! sneak! coward! villain! Stay; he may have his own reasons for concealment—reasons known to Philippa and approved of by her. Not a word against her. She is still my queen; the one woman in the world to me. What she has done is right!

I passed a sleepless night. In the morning I wrote to Philippa. I wished her all happiness—I could command my pen, if not my tongue. I said no word about the secrecy of the wedding, or the evils so often consequent to such concealment. But, with a foreboding of evil to come, I begged her to remember that we were friends; that, although I could see her no more, whenever she wanted a friend's aid, a word would bring me to her side. I used no word of blame. I risked no expression of love or regret. No thought of my grief should jar upon the happiness which she doubtless expected to find. Farewell the one dream of my life! Farewell Philippa!

Such a passion as mine may, in these matter-of-fact, unromantic days, seem an anachronism. No matter, whether to sympathy or ridicule, I am but laying bare my true thoughts and feelings.

I would not return to my home at once. I shrank from going back to my lonely hearth and beginning to eat my heart out. I had made arrangements to stay in town for some days; so I stayed, trying by a course of what is termed gayety to drive remembrance away. Futile effort! How many have tried the same reputed remedy without success!

Four days after my interview with Philippa, I was walking with a friend who knew every one in town. As we passed the door of one of the most exclusive of the clubs, I saw, standing on the steps talking to other men, the man whom I knew was Philippa's husband. His face was turned from me, so I was able to direct my friend's attention to him.

"Who is that man?" I asked.

"That man with the gardenia in his coat is Sir Mervyn Ferrand."

"Who is he? What is he? What kind of a man is he?"

"A baronet. Not very rich. Just about the usual kind of man you see on those steps. Very popular with the ladies, they tell me."

"Is he married?"

"Heaven knows! I don't. I never heard of a Lady Ferrand, although there must be several who are morally entitled to use the designation."

And this was her husband—Philippa's husband!

I clinched my teeth. Why had he married under a false name? Or if she knew that name by which she introduced him to me was false, why was it assumed? Why had the marriage been clandestine? Not only Sir

Mervyn Ferrand, but the noblest in the land should be proud of winning Philippa! The more I thought of the matter, the more wretched I grew. The dread that she had been in some way deceived almost drove me mad. The thought of my proud, beautiful queen some day finding herself humbled to the dust by a scoundrel's deceit was anguish. What could I do?

My first impulse was to demand an explanation, then and there, from Sir Mervyn Ferrand. Yet I had no right or authority so to do. What was I to Philippa save an unsuccessful suitor? Moreover, I felt that she had revealed her secret to me in confidence. If there were good reasons for the concealment, I might do her irretrievable harm by letting this man know that I was aware of his true position in society. No, I could not call him to account. But I must do something, or in time to come my grief may be rendered doubly deep by self-reproach.

The next day I called upon Philippa. She would at least tell me if the name under which the man married her was the true or the false one. Alas! I found she had left her home the day before—left it to return no more! The landlady had no idea whither she was gone, but believed it was her intention to leave England.

After this I threw prudence to the winds. With some trouble I found Sir Mervyn Ferrand's town address. The next day I called on him. He also, I was informed, had just left England. His destination was also unknown.

I turned away moodily. All chance of doing good was at an end. Let the marriage be true or false, Philippa had departed, accompanied by the man who, for purposes of his own, passed under the name of Farmer, but who was really Sir Mervyn Ferrand.

I went back to my home, and amid the wreck of my life's happiness murmured a prayer and registered an oath. I prayed that honor and happiness might be the lot of her I loved; I swore that were she wronged I would with my own hand take vengeance on the man who wronged her.

For myself I prayed nothing—not even forgetfulness, I loved Philippa: I had lost her forever! The past, the present, the future were all summed up in these words!

CHAPTER II.

A VILLAIN'S BLOW.

THEY tell me there are natures stern enough to be able to crush love out of their lives. Ah! not such love as mine! Time, they say, can heal every wound. Not such a wound as mine! My whole existence underwent a change when Philippa showed me the wedding-ring on her finger. No wonder it did. Hope was eliminated from it. From that moment I was a changed man.

Life was no longer worth living. The spur of ambition was blunted; the desire for fame gone; the interest which I had hitherto felt in my profession vanished. All the spring, the elasticity, seemed taken out of my being. For months and months I did my work in a perfunctory manner. It gave me no satisfaction that my practice grew larger. I worked, but I cared nothing for my work. Success gave me no pleasure. An increase to the number of my patients was positively unwelcome to me. So long as I made money enough to supply my daily needs, what did it matter? Of what use was wealth to me? It could not buy me the one thing for which I craved. Of what use was life? No wonder that such friends as I had once possessed all but forsook me. My mood at that time was none of the sweetest. I wanted no friends. I was alone in the world; I should be always alone.

So things went on for more than a year. I grew worse instead of better. My gloom deepened; my cynicism grew more confirmed; my life became more and more aimless.

These are not lovers' rhapsodies. I would spare you them if I could; but it is necessary that you should know the exact state of my mind in order to understand my subsequent conduct. Even now it seems to me that I am writing this description with my heart's blood.

Not a word came from Philippa. I made no inquiries about her, took no steps to trace her. I dared not. Not for one moment did I forget her, and through all those weary months tried to think of her as happy and to be envied; yet, in spite of myself, I shuddered as I pictured her lot as it might really be.

But all the while I knew that the day would come when I should learn whether I was to be thankful that my prayer had been answered, or to be prepared to keep my vow.

In my misanthropical state of mind I heard without the slightest feeling of joy or elation that a distant relative of mine, a man from whom I expected nothing, had died and left me the bulk of his large property. I cared nothing for this unexpected wealth, except for the fact that it enabled me to free myself from a round of toil in which by now I took not the slightest interest. Had it but come two or three years before! Alas! all things in this life come too late.

Now that I was no longer forced to mingle with men in order to gain the means of living, I absolutely shunned my kind. The wish of my youth, to travel in far countries, no longer existed with me. I disposed of my practice—or rather I simply handed it over to the first comer. I left the town of my adoption, and bought a small house—it was little more than a cottage—some five miles away from the tiny town of Roding. Here I was utterly unknown, and could live exactly as I chose; and for months it was my choice to live almost like a hermit.

My needs were ministered to by a man who had been for some years in my employment. He was a handy, faithful fellow; honest as the day, stolid as the Sphinx; and, for some reason or other, so much attached to me that he was willing to perform on my behalf the duties of housekeeping which are usually relegated to female servants.

Looking back upon that time of seclusion, as a medical man, I wonder what would eventually have been my fate if events had not occurred which once more forced me into the world of men? I firmly believe that brooding in solitude over my grief would at last have affected my brain; that sooner or later I must have developed symptoms of melancholia. Professionally speaking, the probabilities are I should have committed suicide.

Even in the depth of my degradation I must have known the dangers of the path which I was treading; for, after having passed six dreary months in my lonely cottage, I was trying to brace myself to seek a change of scene. I shrank from leaving my quiet abode; but every day formed afresh the resolve to do so.

Yet the days, each the same as its forerunner, went by, and I was still there. I had books, of course. I read for days together; then I would throw the volumes aside, and, with a bitter smile, ask myself to what end was I directing my studies. The accumulation of knowledge? Tush! I would give all the learning I had acquired, all that a lifetime of research could acquire, to hold Philippa for one brief moment to my heart, and hear her say she loved me! If in the whirl of men, in the midst of hard work, I found it impossible to conquer my hopeless passion, how could I expect to do so living as I at present lived?

There! my egotistical descriptions are almost over. Now you know why I said that you must sit by the fire and think with me; must enter, as it were, into my inner self before you can understand my mental state. Whether you sympathize with me or not depends entirely on your own organization. If you are so constructed that the love of one woman, and one only, can pervade your very being, fill your every thought, direct your every action, make life to you a blessing or a curse—if love comes to you in this guise, you will be able to understand me.

That night, when I first presented myself to you, my wounds seemed less likely than ever to heal; forgetfulness seemed farther and farther away. Somehow, as my thoughts took the well-worn road to the past, every event seemed recent as yesterday, every scene vivid as if I had just left it. Hour after hour I sat gazing at the glowing embers, but seeing only Philippa's beloved face. How had life fared with her? Where was she at this moment? The resolve to quit my seclusion was made anew by me. I would go into the world and find her—not for any selfish motive. I would learn from her own lips that she was happy. If unhappy, she should have from me such comfort as the love of a true friend can give. Yes, I would leave this wretched life to-morrow. My cheek flushed as I contrasted what I was with what I ought to be. No man has a right to ruin his life or hide his talents for the sake of a woman.

I had another inducement which urged me to make a change in my mode of life. I am ashamed that I have not spoken of it. That morning I had received a letter from my mother. I had not seen her for six years. Just as I entered man's estate she married for the second time. My stepfather was an American, and with many tears my mother left me for her new home. Some months ago her husband died. I should have gone to her, but she forbade me. She had no children by her second husband; and now that his affairs were practically wound up she proposed returning to England. Her letter told me that she would be in London in three days' time, and suggested that I should meet her there.

Although of late years we had drifted apart, she was dear, very dear to me. I hated the thought of her seeing me, her only child, reduced to such a wreck of my former self; yet for her sake I again renewed my resolve of leaving my seclusion.

Yet I knew that to-morrow I should forswear myself, and sink back into my apathy and aimless existence. Ah! I knew not what events were to crowd into the morrow.

But now back to the night. It was mid-winter, and bitterly cold out of doors. My lamp was not yet lighted; the glow of my fire alone broke the darkness of the room. I had not even drawn the curtains or shut the shutters. At times I liked to look out and see the stars. They shone so peacefully, so calmly, so coldly; they seemed so unlike the world, with its strife and fierce passions and disappointments.

I rose languidly from my chair and walked to the window, to see what sort of a night it was. As I approached the casement I could see that the skies had darkened; moreover, I noticed that feathery flakes of snow were accumulating in the corner of each pane. I went close to the window and peered out into the night.

Standing within a yard of me, gazing into my dimly-lit room—her face stern and pale as death, her dark eyes now riveted on my own—was a woman; and that woman was Philippa, my love!

For several seconds I stood spellbound, gazing at her. That I saw more than a phantom of my imagination did not at once enter into my head. In dreams I had seen the one I loved again and again, but this was the first time my waking thoughts had conjured up such a vision. Vision, dream, reality! I trembled as I looked; for the form was that of Philippa in dire distress.

It was seeing the hood which covered her head grow whiter and whiter with the fast-falling snow which aroused me to my senses, and made every fibre thrill with the thought that Philippa, in flesh and blood, stood before me. With a low cry of rapture I tore asunder the fastening of the French casement, threw the sashes apart, and without a word my love passed from the cold, bleak night into my room.

She was wrapped from head to foot in a rich, dark fur-trimmed cloak. As she swept by me I felt she was damp with partially-thawed snow. I closed the window; then with a throbbing heart turned to greet my visitor. She stood in the centre of the room. Her mantle had fallen to the ground, and through the dusk I could see her white face, hands, and neck. I took her hands in mine; they were as cold as icicles.

"Philippa! Philippa! why are you here?" I whispered. "Welcome, thrice welcome, whether you bring me joy or sorrow."

A trembling ran through her. She said nothing, but her cold hands clasped mine closer. I led her to the fire, which I stirred until it blazed brightly. She kneeled before it and stretched out her hands for warmth. How pale she looked; how unlike the Philippa of old! But to my eyes how lovely!

As I looked down at the fair woman kneeling at my feet, with her proud head bent as in shame, I knew intuitively that I should be called upon to keep my oath; and knowing this, I re-registered it in all its entirety.

At last she raised her face to mine. In her eyes was a sombre fire, which until now I had never seen there. "Philippa! Philippa!" I cried again.

"Fetch a light," she whispered. "Let me see a friend's face once more—if you are still my friend."

"Your friend, your true friend forever," I said, as I hastened to obey her.

As I placed the lamp on the table Philippa rose from her knees. I could now see that she was in deep mourning. Was the thought that flashed through me, that it might be that she was a widow, one of joy or sorrow? I hope—I try to believe it was the latter.

We stood for some moments in silence. My agitation, my rapture at seeing her once more seemed to have deprived me of speech. I could do little more than to gaze at her and tell myself that I was not dreaming; that Philippa was really here; that it was her voice that I had heard, her hands I clasped. Philippa it was, but not the Philippa of old!

The rich, warm, glowing beauty seemed toned down. Her face had lost its exquisite color. Moreover, it was the face of one who has suffered—one who is suffering. To me it looked as if illness had refined it, as it sometimes will refine a face. Yet, if she had been ill, her illness could not have been of long duration. Her figure was as superb, her arms as finely rounded, as ever. She stood firm and erect. Yet I trembled as I gazed at that pale proud face and those dark solemn eyes. I dared not for the while ask her why she sought me.

She was the first to break silence. "You are changed, Basil," she said.

"Time changes every one," I answered, forcing a smile.

"Will you believe me," she continued, "when I say that the memory of your face as I saw it last has haunted even my most joyful moments? Ah me! Basil, had I been true to myself I think I might have learned to love you."

She spoke regretfully, and as one who has finished with life and its love. My heart beat rapidly; yet I knew her words were not spoken in order to hear me tell her that I loved her passionately as ever.

"I have heard of you once or twice," she said softly. "You are rich now, they tell me, but unhappy."

"I loved you and lost you," I answered. "How could I be happy?"

"And men can love like this?" she said sadly. "All men are not alike, then?"

"Enough of me," I said. "Tell me of yourself. Tell me how I can aid you. Your husband—"

She drew a sharp, quick breath. The color rushed back to her cheek. Her eyes glittered strangely. Nevertheless, she spoke calmly and distinctly.

"Husband! I have none," she said.

"Is he dead?"

"No"—she spoke with surprising bitterness—"No; I should rather say I never was a wife. Tell me, Basil," she continued fiercely, "did you ever hate a man?"

"Yes," I answered emphatically and truly. Hate a man! From the moment I saw the wretch with whom Philippa fled I hated him. Now that my worst suspicions were true, what were my feelings?

I felt that my lips compressed themselves. I knew that when I spoke my voice was as stern and bitter as Philippa's. "Sit down," I said, "and tell me all. Tell me how you knew I was here—where you have come from."

Let me but learn whence she came, and I felt sure the knowledge would enable me to lay my hand on the man I wanted. Ah! life now held something worth living for!

"I have been here some months," said Philippa.

"Here! In this neighborhood?"

"Yes. I have seen you several times. I have been living at a house about three miles away. I felt happier in knowing that in case of need I had one friend near me."

I pressed her hands. "Go on," I said hoarsely.

"He sent me here. He had grown weary of me. I was about to have a child. I was in his way—a trouble to him."

Her scornful accent as she spoke was indescribable.

"Philippa! Philippa!" I groaned, "had you sunk so low as to do his bidding?"

She laid her hand on my arm. "More," she said. "Listen! Before we parted he struck me. Struck—me! He cursed me and struck me! Basil, did you ever hate a man?"

I threw out my arms. My heart was full of rage and bitterness. "And you became this man's mistress rather than my wife!" I gasped. Neither my love nor her sorrow could stop this one reproach from passing my lips.

She sprang to her feet. "You!" she cried. "Do you —think—do you imagine— Read! Only this morning I learned it."

She threw a letter toward me—threw it with a gesture of loathing, as one throws a nauseous reptile from one's hand. I opened it mechanically.

"Yes," she said, "you were right in thinking I had fallen low. So low that I went where he chose to send me. So low that I would have forgiven the ill-treatment of months—the blow, even. Why? Because until this morning he was my husband. Read the letter. Basil, did you ever hate a man?"

Before I read I glanced at her in alarm. She spoke with almost feverish excitement. Her words followed one another with headlong rapidity. But who could wonder at this mood with a woman who had such a wrong to declare? She grew calm beneath my glance.

"Read," she said beseechingly. "Ah, God! I have fallen low; but not so low as you thought."

She buried her face in her hands while I opened and read the letter. It was dated from Paris, and ran so:

"As it seems to me that we can't exactly hit it off together, I think the farce had better end. The simplest way to make my meaning clear is to tell you that when I married you I had a wife alive. She has died since then; and I dare say, had we managed to get on better together, I should have asked you to go through the marriage ceremony once more. However, as things are now, so they had better stop. You have the satisfaction of knowing that morally you are blameless.

"If, like a sensible girl, you are ready to accept the situation, I am prepared to act generously, and do the right thing in money matters. As I hate to have anything hanging over me unsettled, and do not care to trust delicate negotiations to a third party, I shall run across to England and see you. I shall reach Roding on Wednesday evening. Do not send to the station to meet me; I would rather walk."

The letter was unsigned. My blood boiled as I read it; yet, in spite of my rage, I felt a grim humor as I realized the exquisite cynicism possessed by the writer. Here was a man striking a foul and recreant blow at a woman whom he once loved—a blow that must crush her to the earth. His own words confess him a rogue, a bigamist; and yet he can speak coolly about money arrangements; can even enter into petty details concerning his approaching visit! He must be without shame, without remorse; a villain, absolutely heartless!

I folded the letter and placed it in my breast. I wished to keep it, that I might read it again and again during the next twenty-four hours. Long hours they would be. This letter would aid me to make them pass. Philippa made no objection to my keeping it. She sat motionless, gazing gloomily into the fire.

"You knew the man's right name and title?" I asked.

"Yes, from the first. Ah! there I wronged myself, Basil! The rank, the riches, perhaps tempted me; and —Basil, I loved him then."

Oh, the piteous regret breathed in that last sentence! I ground my teeth, and felt that there was a stronger passion than even love. "That man and I meet to-morrow," I told myself softly.

"But you spoke of a child?" I said, turning to Philippa.

"It is dead—dead—dead!" she cried, with a wild laugh. "A fortnight ago it died. Dead! My grief then; my joy to-day! See! I am in mourning; to-morrow I shall put that mourning off. Why mourn for what is a happy event? No black after to-morrow."

Her mood had once more become excited. As before, her words came with feverish rapidity. I took her hands in mine; they were now burning.

"Philippa, dearest, be calm. You will see that man no more?"

"I will see him no more. It is to save myself from seeing him that I come to you. Little right have I to ask aid from you; but your words came back to me in my need. There was one friend to turn to. Help me, Basil! I come to you as a sister may come to a brother."

"As a sister to a brother," I echoed. "I accept the trust," I added, laying my lips reverentially on her white forehead, and vowing mentally to devote my life to her.

"You will stay here now?" I asked.

"No, I must go back. To-morrow I will come—to-morrow. Basil, my brother, you will take me far away—far away?"

"Where you wish. Every land is one as to me now."

She had given me the right, a brother's right, to stand between her and the villain who had wronged her. To-morrow that man would be here! How I longed for the moment which would bring us face to face!

Philippa rose. "I must go," she said.

I pressed food and wine upon her: she would take nothing. She made, however, no objection to my accompanying her to her home. We left the house by the casement by which she entered. Together we stepped out on the snow-whitened road. She took my arm, and we walked toward her home.

I asked her with whom she was staying. She told me with a widow lady and two children, named Wilson. She went to them at Sir Mervyn Ferrand's command. Mrs. Wilson, he told her, was a distant connection of his own, and he had made arrangements for her to look after Philippa during her illness.

It was but another proof of the man's revolting cynicism. To send the woman who falsely believed herself to be his wife to one of his own relations! Oh, I would have a full reckoning with him!

"What name do they know you by?" I asked.

"He said I was to call myself by the false name, which, for purposes of his own, he chose to pass under. But I felt myself absolved from my promise of secrecy. Why should I stay in a strange house with strange people by Sir Mervyn Ferrand's request, unless I could show good cause for doing so? So I told Mrs. Wilson everything."

"She believed you?"

"She was bound to believe me. I would have no doubt cast upon my word. I showed her the certificate of my marriage. Whatever she may have thought at first, she saw then that I was his wife. No one else knows it except her. To her I am Lady Ferrand. Like me, she never dreamed to what man's villainy can reach. O Basil! Basil! why are such men allowed to live?"

For the first time Philippa seemed to break down. Till now the chief characteristics of her mood had been scorn and anger. Now, sheer grief for the time appeared to sweep away every other emotion. Sob after sob broke from her. I endeavored to calm her—to comfort her. Alas! how little I could say or do to these ends! She leaned heavily and despondingly on my arm, and for a long while we walked in silence. At last she told me her home was close at hand.

"Listen, Philippa," I said; "I shall come in with you and see this lady with whom you are staying. I shall tell her I am your brother; that for some time I have known how shamefully your husband has neglected you; and that now, with your full consent, I mean to take you away. Whether this woman believes in our relationship or not, matters nothing. I suppose she knows that man is coming to-morrow. After his heartless desertion she cannot be surprised at your wish to avoid meeting him."

I paused. Philippa bent her head as if assenting to my plan.

"To-morrow," I continued, "long before that wretch comes here to poison the very air we breathe, I shall come and fetch you. Early in the morning I will send my servant for your luggage. Mrs. Wilson may know me and my man by sight. That makes no difference. There need be no concealment. You are free to come and go. You have no one to fear. On Thursday morning we will leave this place."

"Yes," said Philippa dreamily, "to-morrow I will leave—I will come to you. But I will come alone. In the evening most likely, when no one will know where I have gone."

"But how much better that I should take you away openly and in broad daylight, as a brother would take a sister!"

"No; I will come to you. You will not mind waiting, Basil. There is something I must do first. Something to be done to-morrow. Something to be said; some one to be seen. What is it? who is it? I cannot recollect."

She placed her disengaged hand on her brow. She pushed back her head a little, and gave a sigh of relief as she felt the keen air on her temples. Poor girl! after what she had that day gone through, no wonder her mind refused to recall trivial details and petty arrangements to be made before she joined me. Sleep and the certainty of my sympathy and protection would no doubt restore her wandering memory.

However, although I again and again urged her to change her mind, she was firm in her resolve to come to me alone. At last, very reluctantly, I was obliged to give way on this point; but I was determined to see this Mrs. Wilson to-night; so when we reached the house I entered with Philippa.

I told her there was no occasion for her to be present at my interview with the hostess. She looked frightfully weary, and at my suggestion went straight to her room to retire for the night. I sat down and awaited the the advent of Mrs. Wilson. She soon appeared.

A woman of about five-and-thirty; well but plainly dressed. As I glanced at her with some curiosity, I decided that when young she must, after a certain type of beauty, have been extremely good-looking. Unfortunately hers was one of those faces cast in an aquiline mould—faces which, as soon as the bloom of youth is lost or the owners thereof turn to thinness, become, as a rule, sharp, strained, hungry, and severe-looking. Whatever the woman's charms might once have been, she could now boast of very few.

There were lines around her mouth and on her brow which told of suffering; and, as I judged it, not the calm, resigned suffering, which often leaves a sweet if sad expression on the face; but fierce, rebellious, constrained suffering, such as turns a young heart into an old one long before its time.

As she entered the room and bowed to me her face expressed undisguised surprise at seeing a visitor who was a stranger to her. I apologized for the lateness of my call; then hastened to tell her its object. She listened with polite impassibility. She made no comment when I repeatedly spoke of my so-styled sister as Lady Ferrand. It was clear that, as Philippa had said, Mrs. Wilson was convinced as to the valid nature of the marriage. I inveighed roundly against Sir Mervyn Ferrand's heartless conduct and scandalous neglect of his wife. My hearer shrugged her shoulders, and the meaning conveyed by the action was that, although she regretted family jars, they were no concern of hers. She seemed quite without interest in the matter; yet a suspicion that she was acting, indeed rather over-acting, a part, crossed my mind once or twice.

When I told her it was Lady Ferrand's intention to place herself to-morrow under my protection, she simply bowed. When I said that most likely we should leave England, and for a while travel on the continent, she said that my sister's health would no doubt be much benefited by the change.

"I may mention," she added, for the first time taking any real part in the talk, "that your sister's state is not quite all it should be. For the last day or two I have been thinking of sending for the medical man who attended her during her unfortunate confinement. He has not seen her for quite a week. I mentioned it to her this afternoon; but she appears to have taken an unaccountable dislike to him, and utterly refused to see him. I do not wish to alarm you—I merely mention this; no doubt you, her brother, will see to it."

The peculiar stress she laid on the word "brother" told me that I was right in thinking the woman was acting, and that not for one moment did my assumed fraternity deceive her. This was of no consequence.

"I am myself a doctor. Her health will be my care," I said. Then I rose.

"You are related to Sir Mervyn Ferrand, I believe, Mrs. Wilson?" I asked.

She gave me a quick look which might mean anything. "We are connections," she said carelessly.

"You must have been surprised at his sending his wife away at such a time?"

"I am not in the habit of feeling surprised at Sir Mervyn's actions. He wrote to me and told me that, knowing my circumstances were straitened, he had recommended a lady to come and live with me for a few months. When I found this lady was his wife, I own I was, for once, surprised."

From the emphasis which she laid on certain words, I knew it was but the fact of Philippa's being married to the scoundrel that surprised her, nothing else. I could see that Mrs. Wilson knew Sir Mervyn Ferrand thoroughly, and something told me that her relations with him were of a nature which might not bear investigation.

I bade her good-night, and walked back to my cottage with a heart in which sorrow, pity, love, hatred, exultation, and, it may be, hope, were strangely and inextricably mingled.

CHAPTER III.

"THE WAGES OF SIN."

MORNING! No books; no idle, listless hours for me to-day. Plenty to do, plenty to think about; all sorts of arrangements to make. Farewell to my moody, sullen life. Farewell to my aimless, selfish existence. Henceforward I should have something worth living for—worth dying for, if needs be! Philippa was coming to me to-day; coming in grief, it is true; coming as a sister comes to a brother. Ah! after all the weary, weary waiting, I shall see her to-day—to-morrow, every day! If a man's devotion, homage, worship, and respect can in her own eyes reinstate my queen, I shall some day see the bloom come back to her cheek, the bright smile play once more round her mouth, the dark eyes again eloquent with happy thoughts. And then—and then! what should I care for the world or its sneers? To whom, save myself, should I be answerable? Then I might whisper in her ear, "Sweet, let the past vanish from our lives as a dream. Let happiness date from to-day."

Although Philippa would grace my poor cottage for one night only, I had a thousand preparations to make for her comfort. Fortunately I had a spare room, and, moreover, a furnished one. Not that I should have troubled, when I went into my seclusion, about such a superfluity as a guest-chamber; but as it happened I had bought the house and the furniture complete, so could offer my welcome guest fair accommodation for the night.

I summoned my stolid man. I told him that my sister was coming on a visit to me; that she would sleep here to-night, but that most likely we should go away to-morrow. He could stay and look after the house until I returned or sent him instructions what to do with it. William manifested no surprise. Had I told him to make preparations for the coming of my wife and five children, he would have considered it all a part of the day's work, and would have done his best to meet my requirements.

He set to work in his imperturbable, methodical, but handy way to get Philippa's room in trim. As soon as this was done, and the neglected chamber made cosey and warm-looking, I told him to borrow a horse and cart somewhere, and fetch the luggage from Mrs. Wilson's. He was to mention no names; simply to say that he had come for the luggage, and to ask if the lady had any message to send.

Then I sat down in the room which my love would occupy, and mused upon the strange but unhappy chance which was bringing her beneath my roof. I wished that I had an enchanter's wand to turn the humble garniture of the chamber into surroundings meet for my queenly Philippa. I wished that I had, at least, flowers with which I could deck her resting-place; for I remembered how passionately she loved flowers. Alas! I had not seen a flower for months.

Then I drew out Sir Mervyn Ferrand's letter, read it again and again, and cursed the writer in my heart.

William was away about two hours; then he made his appearance with some boxes. I was delighted to see these tangible signs that Philippa meant to keep her promise. Till that moment I had been troubled by something like the doubt, that after all she might, upon calm reflection, rescind the resolution formed in her excitement. Now her coming seemed to be a certainty.

Nevertheless, William brought no message; so there was nothing for me to do but wait patiently until she chose to cross my threshold.

Although my pleasing labors of love were ended, I was not left idle. There was another task to be done to-day. I set my teeth and sat down, thinking quietly as to the way in which it might be best performed. To-night I meant to stand face to face with that black-hearted scoundrel known as Sir Mervyn Ferrand!

I consulted the time-table. His letter named no particular hour; but I saw that if he carried out his expressed intention of being here to-night, there was but one train by which he could come; there was but one way from Roding to the house at which Philippa had been staying. He meant to walk, his letter said; this might be in order to escape observation. The train was due at Roding at seven o'clock. The weather was cold; a man would naturally walk fast. Mrs. Wilson's house must be four miles from the station. Let me start from there just before the train arrives, and I should probably meet him about half-way on his journey. It would be dark, but I should know him. I should know him among a thousand. There on the open lonely road Sir Mervyn Ferrand, coming gayly, and in his worldly cynicism certain of cajoling, buying off, or in some other way silencing the woman who had in an evil day trusted to his honor and love, would meet, not her, but the man who from the first had sworn that a wrong to Philippa should be more than a wrong to himself! He would meet this man, and be called to account.

Stern and sinister as were my thoughts—freely and unreservedly as I record them: as indeed I endeavor in this tale to record everything—I do not wish to be misjudged. It is true that in my present mood I was bent upon avenging Philippa with my own hand; true that I meant, if possible, to take at some time or another this man's life; but at least no thought of taking any advantage of an unarmed or unsuspecting man entered into my scheme of vengeance. I designed no murderous attack. But it was my intention to stop the man on his path; to confront him and tell him that his villany was known to me; that Philippa had fled to me for aid; that she was now in my custody; and that I, who stood in the position of her brother, demanded the so-called satisfaction which, by the old-fashioned code of honor, was due from the man who had ruthlessly betrayed a woman. Well I knew that it was probable he would laugh at me—tell me that the days of duelling were over, and refuse to grant my request. Then I meant to see if insults could warm his noble blood; if my hand on his cheek could bring about the result which I desired. If this failed, I would follow him abroad, cane him and spit upon him in public places.

A wild scheme for these prosaic law-abiding days; yet the only one that was feasible. It may be said that I should have taken steps to have caused the miscreant to be arrested for bigamy. But what proof of his crime had we as yet, save his own unsigned confession? Who was to move in the matter—Philippa—myself? We did not even know where this wife of whom he had spoken lived, or where she died. There were a hundred ways in which he might escape from justice, but whether he was punished for his sin or allowed to go scot-free, Philippa's name and wrongs must be bruited about, her shame made public. No; there was but one course to take, and but one person to take it. It rested with me to avenge the wrongs of the woman I loved by the good old-fashioned way of a life against a life.

Truly, as I said, I had now plenty to live for!

The hours went by, yet Philippa came not. I grew restless and uneasy as the dusk began to make the road, up which I gazed almost continually, dim and indistinct. When the short winter's day was over, and the long dark night had fairly begun, my restlessness turned into fear. I walked out of my house and paced my garden to and fro. I blamed myself for having yielded so lightly to Philippa's wish—her command rather—that I should on no account fetch her. But then, whenever did I resist a wish, much less a command of hers? Oh, that I had been firm this once!

The snow-storm of the previous evening had not lasted long—not long enough to thoroughly whiten the world. The day had been fine and frosty, but I knew that the wind had changed since the sun went down. It was warmer, a change which I felt sure presaged a heavy downfall of snow or rain. There was a moon, a fitful moon; for clouds were flying across it, dark clouds, which I guessed would soon gather coherence and volume, and veil entirely that bright face, which now only showed itself at irregular intervals.

The minutes were passing away. I grew nervous and excited. Why does she not come? My hope had been to see my poor girl safely housed before I started to execute my other task. Why does she not come? Time, precious time, is slipping by! In the hope of meeting her, I walked for some distance up the road. "Why does she delay?" I groaned. Even now I should be on my way to Roding, or I may miss my prey. Heavens! can it be that she is waiting to see this man once more? Never! never! Perish the thought!

But, all the same, every fibre in my body quivered at the bare supposition of such a thing.

I could bear the suspense no longer. For the hundredth time I glanced at my watch. It wanted but ten minutes to seven o'clock, and at that hour I had resolved to start from Mrs. Wilson's, on my way to Roding. Yet now I dared not leave my own house. Any moment might bring Philippa. What would she think if I were not there to receive and welcome her.

Five more precious moments gone! I stamped in my rage. After all, I can only do one half of my task; the sweet, but not the stern half. Shall I, indeed, do either? The train must now be close to Roding. In an hour everything may be lost. The man will see her before she leaves the house. He will persuade her. She will listen to his words; for did he not once love her? He must have loved her! After all, he broke the laws for the sake of possessing her, and—cursed thought!—she loved him then; and she is but a woman!

So I tortured myself until my state of mind grew unbearable. At all hazard, I must prevent Ferrand from meeting Philippa. Oh, why had she not come as she promised? Could it be she was detained against her will? In spite of her uninterested manner, I distrusted the woman I had seen last night. It is now past seven o'clock. Philippa's house, from which I had reckoned my time, was nearly three miles away. I must give up my scheme of vengeance. I must go in search of Philippa. If I do not meet her I must call at Mrs. Wilson's, find out what detains her, and if needful bear her away by force.

By this time my steps had brought me back to my own house. I called William, and told him I was going to walk up the road and meet my expected guest. If by any chance I should miss her, he was to welcome her on my behalf, and tell her the reason for my absence.

"Best take a lantern, sir," said William; "moon'll soon be hidden, and them roads is precious rough."

"I can't be bothered with that great horn affair," I said, rather testily.

"Take the little one—the bull's-eye—that's better than nothing," said William. To humor him I put it into my pocket.

I ran at the top of my speed to the house at which I had last night left Philippa. It took me nearly half an hour getting there. I rang the bell impetuously. The door was opened by a maid-servant. I inquired for Mrs. Farmer, knowing that Philippa had passed under this name to all except her hostess. To my surprise I was told that she had left the house, on foot and alone, some little while ago. The maid believed she was not going to return, as her luggage had that morning been sent for.

The first effect of this intelligence was to cause me to blame my haste. I must have missed her; no doubt passed her on the road. No; such a thing was impossible. The way was a narrow one. The moon still gave some light. If I had met Philippa, I must have seen her. She must have seen me, and would then have stopped me. She could not have gone the way I came.

But where was she? In what direction was I to seek her? Argue the matter as I would—loth as I was to allow myself to be convinced, I was bound to decide that she must have taken the path to Roding. There was no other. She had gone, even as I was going, to meet Ferrand. She may have started intending to come to me; but at the last moment a desire to see the man once more—I fondly hoped for the purpose of heaping reproaches on his head—had mastered her. Yes, whatever her object might be, she had gone to meet him. And my heart sank as conviction was carried to it by the remembrance that coupled with her refusal to permit me to fetch her was an assertion that she had something to do before she came to me. That, as I now read it, could be but one thing—to meet this man!

Never again, if I can help it, shall his voice strike on her ear! Never again shall their eyes meet! Never again shall the touch of even his finger contaminate her! Let me follow, and stand between her and the scoundrel. If they meet he will wound her to the heart. Her pride will rise; she will threaten. Then the coward will try another line. He will plead for mercy; he will swear he still loves her; he will bait his hook with promises. She will listen; hesitate; perhaps yield, and find herself once more deceived. Then she will be lost to me forever. Now she is, in my eyes, pure as when first we met. Let me haste on, overtake, pass her; meet her betrayer, and, if needful, strike him to the ground.

As I turned from the house I became aware that a great and sudden change had come over the night. It seemed to me that, even in the few minutes which I had spent in considering what to do, the heavy clouds had banked and massed together. It was all but pitch-dark;

so dark that I paused, and drawing from my pocket the lantern with which William's foresight had provided me, managed after several trials to light it. Then, impatient at the delay, I sped up the road.

I was now almost facing the wind. All at once, sharp and quick, I felt the blinding snow on my face. The wind moaned through the leafless branches on either side of the road. The snow-flakes whirled madly here and there. Even in my excitement I was able to realize the fact that never before had I seen in England so fierce a snow-storm, or one which came on so suddenly. And, like myself, Philippa was abroad, and exposed to its full fury. Heavens! she might lose her way, and wander about all night.

This fear quickened my steps. I forced my way on through the mad storm. For the time all thought of Sir Mervyn Ferrand and vengeance left my heart. All I now wanted was to find Philippa; to lead her home, and see her safe beneath my roof. "Surely," I said, as I battled along, "she cannot have gone much farther."

I kept a sharp lookout—if, indeed, it can be called a lookout; for the whirling snow made everything, save what was within a few feet of me, invisible. I strained my ears to catch the faintest cry or other sound. I went on, flashing my lantern first on one and then on the other side of the road. My dread was that Philippa, utterly unable to fight against the white tempest, might be crouching under one of the banks, and if so I might pass without seeing her or even attracting her attention. My doing so on such a night as this might mean her death.

Oh, why had she not come as promised? Why had she gone to meet the man who had so foully wronged her? After what had happened, she could not, dared not love him. And for a dreary comfort I recalled the utter bitterness of her accent last night when she turned to me and said, "Basil, did you ever hate a man?" No, she could not love him!

These thoughts brought my craving for vengeance back to my mind. Where was Ferrand? By all my calculations, taking into account the time wasted at starting, I should by now have met him. Perhaps he had not come, after all. Perhaps the look of the weather had frightened him, and he had decided to stay at Roding for the night. I raged at the thought! If only I knew that Philippa was safely housed, nothing, in my present frame of mind, would have suited me better than to have met him on this lonely road, in the midst of this wild storm. If Philippa were only safe!

Still no sign of her. I began to waver in my mind. What if my first supposition, that I had passed her on the road, was correct? She might be now at my cottage, wondering what had become of me. Should I go farther or turn back? But what would be my feelings if I did the latter, and found when I arrived home that she had not made her appearance?

I halted, irresolute, in the centre of the road. Instinctively I beat my hands together to promote circulation. I had left my home hurriedly, and had made no provision for the undergoing of such an ordeal as this terrible, unprecedented snow-storm inflicted. In spite of the speed at which I had travelled, my hands and feet were growing numbed, my face smarted with the cold. Heaven help me to decide aright, whether to go on or turn back!

The decision was not left to me. Suddenly, close at hand, I heard a wild peal, a scream of laughter which made my blood run cold. Swift from the whirling, tossing, drifting snow emerged a tall gray figure. It swept past me like the wind; but as it passed me I knew that my quest was ended—that Philippa was found!

She vanished in a second, before the terror which rooted me to the spot had passed away. Then I turned and, fast as I could run, followed her, crying as I went, "Philippa! Philippa!"

I soon overtook her; but so dark was the night that I was almost touching her before I saw her shadowy, ghost-like form. I threw my arms round her and held her. She struggled violently in my grasp.

"Philippa, dearest! it is I, Basil," I said, bending close to her ear.

The sound of my voice seemed to calm her, or I should rather say she ceased to struggle.

"Thank Heaven, I have found you!" I said. "Let us get back as soon as possible."

"Back! No! Go on, go on!" she exclaimed. "On, on, on, up the road yet awhile—on through the storm, through the snow—on till you see what I have left behind me! On till you see the wages of sin—the wages of sin!"

Her words came like bullets from a mitrailleuse. Through the night I could see her face gleaming whiter than the snow on her hood. I could see her great, fixed, dark eyes full of nameless horror.

"Dearest, be calm," I said, and strove to take her hands in mine.

As I tried to gain possession of her right hand something fell from it, and, although the road was now coated with snow, a metallic sound rang out as it touched the ground. Mechanically I stooped and picked up the fallen object.

As I did so Philippa with a wild cry wrested herself from the one hand whose numbed grasp still sought to retain her, and with a frenzied reiteration of the words, "The wages of sin!" fled from me, and was lost in the night.

Even as I rushed in pursuit I shuddered as the sense of feeling told me what thing it was I had picked up from the snowy ground. It was a small pistol! Cold as the touch of the metal must have been, it seemed to burn me like a coal of fire. Impulsively, thoughtlessly, as I ran I hurled the weapon from me, far, far away. Why should it have been in Philippa's hand this night?

I ran madly on, but not for long. My foot caught in a stone, and I fell, half stunned and quite breathless, to the ground. It was some minutes before I recovered myself sufficiently to once more stand erect. Philippa must have obtained a start which, coupled with her frenzied speed, almost precluded the possibility of my overtaking her.

Moreover, a strange, uncontrollable impulse swayed me. The touch of that deadly weapon still burned my hand. Philippa's words still rang in my ears. "On, on, on, up the road yet awhile!" she had cried. What did she mean? What had been done to-night?

I must retrace my steps. I must see! I must know! Philippa is flying through the cold, dark, deadly night; but her frame is but the frame of a woman. She must soon grow exhausted, perhaps sink senseless on the road. Nevertheless, the dreadful fears which are growing in my mind must be set at rest; then I can resume the pursuit. At all cost I must know what has happened!

Once more I turned and faced the storm. Heavens! anything might happen on such a night as this! I went on and on, flashing my lantern as I went on the centre and each side of the road. I went some distance past that spot where I judged that Philippa had swept by me. Then suddenly, with a cry of horror, I stopped short. At my very feet, in the middle of the highway, illumined by the disk of light cast by my lantern, lay a whitened mass, and as my eye fell upon it I knew only too well the meaning of Philippa's wild exclamation, "The wages of sin! The wages of sin!"

CHAPTER IV.

AT ALL COST, SLEEP!

DEAD! Before I kneeled beside him, and, after unbuttoning his coat, laid my hand on his breast, I knew the man was dead. Before I turned the lantern on his white face I knew who the man was. Sir Mervyn Ferrand had paid for his sin with his life! It needed little professional skill to determine the cause of his death. A bullet fired, it seemed to me, at close quarters had passed absolutely through the heart. He must have fallen without a moan. Killed, I knew, by the hand of the woman he had wronged.

A sneering smile yet lingered on his set features. I could even imagine the words which had accompanied it, when swift and sudden, without one moment's grace for repentance or confession, death had been meted out to him. At one moment he stood erect and full of life, mocking, it may be, her who had trusted him and had been betrayed; at the next, before the sentence he was speaking was completed, he lay lifeless at her feet, with the snow-flakes beginning to form his winding-sheet!

Oh, it was vengeance! swift, deadly vengeance! But why, oh, why had she wreaked it? Philippa, my peerless Philippa, a murderess! Oh, it was too fearful, too horrible! I must be dreaming. All my own thoughts of revenge left me. It was for the time pity, sheer pity, I felt for the man, cut off in the prime of his life. While I knew he was alive I could look forward to and picture the minute when we should stand coolly seeking to kill one another; but now that he was dead, I hated him no longer. Ah! death is a sacred thing. Dead! Sir Mervyn Ferrand dead, and slain by Philippa!

It could not be true! It should not be true! Yet I shuddered as I remembered the passion she had thrown into those words, "Basil, did you ever hate a man?" I gave a low cry of anguish as I remembered how I had hurled from me the pistol she had let fall—the very weapon which had done the dreadful deed.

Killed by Philippa! Not in a sudden burst of uncontrollable passion, but with deliberate intent. She must have gone armed to meet him. She must have shot him through the heart; must have seen him fall. Then, only then, the horrible deed which she had wrought must have been fully realized! Then she had turned and fled from the spot in a frenzy. Oh, my poor girl! my poor girl!

Utterly bewildered by my anguish, I rose from my knees and stood for a while beside the corpse. It was in that moment I learned how much I really loved the woman who had done this thing. Over all my grief and horror this love rose paramount. At all cost I must save her—save her from the hands of justice; save her from the fierce elements which her tender frame was even at this moment braving. And as I recalled how she had sought me yesterday with the tale of her wrong—how she had wildly fled from me, a few minutes ago, madly, blindly into the night; as I thought of the injuries she had suffered, and which had led her to shed this man's blood; as I contrasted her in her present position with what she was when first I knew her and loved her, the pity began to fade from my heart; my thoughts toward the lifeless form at my feet grew stern and sombre, and I found myself beginning, by the old code of an eye for an eye, to justify, although I regretted, Philippa's fearful act. Right or wrong, she was the woman I loved; and I swore I would save her from the consequences of her crime, even—heaven help me!—if the accusation, when made, must fall upon my shoulders.

Yet it was not the beginning of any scheme to evade justice which induced me to raise the dead body and bear it to the side of the road, where I placed it under the low bank on which the hedge grew. It was the reverence which one pays to death made me do this. I could not leave the poor wretch lying in the very middle of the highway, for the first passer-by to stumble against. To-morrow he would, of course, be found. To-morrow the hue and cry would be out! To-morrow Philippa, my Philippa, would— Oh, heavens! never, never, never!

So I laid what was left of Sir Mervyn Ferrand reverentially by the side of the lonely road. I even tried to close his glassy eyes, and I covered his face with his own handkerchief. Then with heart holding fear and anguish enough for a lifetime, I turned and went in search of the poor unhappy girl.

Where should I seek her? Who knew what her remorse may have urged her to do? Who knew whither her horror may have driven her? It needs but to find Philippa lifeless on the road to complete the heaviest tale of grief which can be exacted from one man in one short night! I clenched my teeth and rushed on.

I had the road all to myself. No one was abroad in such weather. Indeed, few persons were seen at night in any weather in this lonely part of the country. I made straight for my own house. The dismal thought came to me, that unless Philippa kept to the road she was lost to me forever. If she strayed to the right or to the left, how on such a night could I possibly find her? My one hope was, that she would go straight to my cottage; so thither I made the best of my way. If she had not arrived, I must get what assistance I could, and seek for her in the fields to the right and left of the road. It was a dreary comfort to remember that all the ponds and spaces of water were frozen six inches thick!

I hesitated a moment when I reached her late residence. Should I inquire if she had returned thither? No; when morning revealed the ghastly event of the night, my having done so would awake suspicion. Let me first go home.

Home at last! In a moment I shall know the worst. I opened the slide of my lantern, which was still alight, and threw the rays on the path which led to my door. My heart gave a great bound of thankfulness. There on the snow, not yet obliterated by more recent flakes, were the prints of a small foot. Philippa, as I prayed but scarcely dared to hope she might, had come straight to my house.

My man opened the door for me. It was well I had seen those footprints, as my knowledge of Philippa's arrival enabled me to assume a natural air.

"My sister has come?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; about a quarter of an hour ago."

"We missed each other on the road. What a night!" I said, throwing off my snow-covered coat.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"In the sitting-room, sir." Then, lowering his voice, William added, "She seemed just about in a tantrum when she found you weren't at home. I expect we shall find her a hard lady to please."

William, in spite of his stolidity, occasionally ventured upon some liberty when addressing me.

His words greatly surprised me. I forced myself to make some laughing rejoinder; then I turned the handle of the door and entered the room in which Philippa had taken refuge.

Oh, how my heart throbbed! What would she say to me? What could I, fresh from that dreadful scene, say to her? Would she excuse or palliate, would she simply confess or boldly justify her crime? Would she plead her wrongs in extenuation? Would she assert that in a moment of ungovernable rage she had done the deed? No matter what she said; she was still Philippa, and even at the cost of my own life and honor I would save her.

Yet as I advanced into the room a shudder ran through me. Fresh to my mind came the remembrance of that white face, that still form, lying as I had left it, with the pure white snow falling thickly around it.

Philippa was sitting in front of the fire. Her hat was removed; her dark hair dishevelled and gleaming wet with the snow which had melted in it. She must have heard me enter and close the door, but she took no notice. As I approached her she turned her shoulder upon me in a pettish way, and as one who by the action means to signify displeasure. I came to her side and stood over her, waiting for her to look up and speak first. She must speak first! What can I say, after all that has happened to-night?

But she kept a stony silence—kept her eyes still turned from mine. At last I called her by her name, and bending down, looked into her face.

Its expression was one of sullen anger, and, moreover, anger which seemed to deepen as she heard my voice. She made a kind of contemptuous gesture, as if waving me aside.

"Philippa," I said, as sternly as I could, "speak to me!"

I laid my hand upon her arm. She shook it off fiercely, and then started to her feet.

"You ask me to speak to you," she said; "you, who have treated me like this! Oh, it is shameful! shameful! shameful! I come through storm and snow—come to you, who were to welcome me as a brother! Where are you? Away, your wretched servant tells me. Why are you away? I trusted you! Oh, you are a pretty brother! If you had cared for me or respected me, you would have been here to greet me. No! you are all in a league—all in a league to ruin me! Now I am here, what will you do? Poison me, of course! kill me, and make away with me, even as that other doctor killed and made away with my poor child! He did! I say he did! I saw him do it! 'A child of shame,' he said; so he killed it! All, all, all,—even you—you, whom I trusted—leagued against me!"

She was trembling with excitement. Her words ran one into the other. It was as much as I could do to follow them; yet the above is but a brief condensation of what she said. With unchecked volubility she continued to heap reproaches and accusations, many of which were of the most extravagant and frivolous nature, on my head. At last she was silent, and reseated herself in her former attitude; and the sullen, discontented, ill-used look again settled on her face.

And yet, although I, who loved her above all the world, was the object of her fierce reproaches, no words I had as yet listened to came more sweetly to my ear than these. A great joy swept through me; a tide of relief bore me to comparative happiness. Whatever dreadful deed the poor girl had that night accomplished, she was morally innocent. Philippa was not accountable for her actions!

As a doctor, I read the truth at once. The rapid flow of words, the changing moods, the vehement excitement, the sullen air, the groundless suspicions—one and all carried conviction, and told me what was wrong. Mrs. Wilson's words of yesterday, which warned me that Philippa's health should be inquired into, added absolute certainty.

My professional brethren who may happen to read this will understand me when I say that, although it is long since I have practised as a doctor, I am sorely tempted, as I reach this stage of my story, to give in detail the particulars which induced me to arrive at such a belief. No physician, no surgeon, lives who does not feel it his duty as well as his pleasure to give an accurate account of any out-of-the-common case which has come under his notice. But I am not writing these pages for the benefit of science; and having no wish to make my tale assume the authority of a hospital report, shall restrain myself, and on technical points be as brief as possible.

In short, then, Philippa had fallen a victim to that mania which not uncommonly shows itself after the birth of a child—that dread, mysterious disease which may, at the moment when everything seems going well, turn a house of joy into a house of mourning; a disease the source of which I have no hesitation in saying has not yet been properly traced and investigated. So far as I know, there is no monograph on the subject, or certainly there was none at that time.

Still, it is admitted by all the authorities that this species of insanity is not unfrequently produced by a severe mental shock, especially when that shock is accompanied by an overwhelming sense of shame. Statistics show us that unmarried women who are mothers, and feel the degradation of such a position acutely, are peculiarly liable to be attacked by the mysterious malady. Esquirol was, I believe, the first to notice this fact, and the correctness of his view has subsequently been confirmed by many others.

Such being the case, it is small wonder that Philippa, waking yesterday morning to receive the intelligence that her marriage with Sir Mervyn Ferrand had been a farce, should have been thrown into a state extremely susceptible to the attack of the disease. Her careless exposure of herself to the wintry air, when last night she sought me and claimed my aid, most probably hastened the attack of the foe. Mrs. Wilson had noticed her strange manner. I myself have remarked upon her rapid changes from calmness to excitability. It was clear to me that even when she visited me last night the mischief had begun to develop itself. I blamed my blindness bitterly. I ought to have seen what was wrong. Considering her agitated state, I ought to have been warned, and have taken precautions; but I had attributed those fitful changes, the meaning of which was now only too plain to me, to the natural agitation experienced by a passionate yet pure-minded woman, who found herself betrayed and brought to shame. Oh, had I but guessed the real cause, or rather the way in which her grief had affected her, all the dark work of that night might have been left undone!

Although in many ways it added to the difficulties and dangers which surrounded us, the discovery of the truth was an unspeakable relief to me. No right-minded man could now call the poor girl guilty of crime. The man's blood was indeed on her hands; yet she had shed it, not knowing what she did. Her frenzy must then have been at its height. The idea of his coming that night must in some way have occurred to her. The desire to see him must have driven her to go and meet him. Her wrongs—perhaps the dread she now felt of him may have induced her to arm herself; perhaps she carried the weapon for self-protection. Any way, she was mad when she started; she was mad when she drew the trigger; she was mad when she broke from my grasp; she was mad now as she sat by my fire, eying me with morose, suspicious glances. She was mad—and innocent!

Her manner toward me troubled me but little. It is a well-known peculiarity of the disease that the patient turns with hatred from those who were the nearest and dearest to her. Fits of sullen, stubborn silence, alternating with fierce outbursts of vituperation, are the most common characteristics of the mania. Hideous, startling as it is to see the change wrought in the sufferer, the malady is by no means of such an alarming nature as it seems. In fact the majority of cases are treated with perfect success.

But all this is professional talk. Again I say that the discovery of Philippa's state of mind was an immense relief to me. My conscience was cleared of a weight which was pressing upon it. I felt braced up to use every effort, and thoroughly justified in following whatever course I thought best. Moreover, a new relationship was now established between Philippa and myself. For a while every feeling save one must be banished. We were now doctor and patient.

After much persuasion, I induced her to let me feel her pulse. As I expected, I found it up nearly to 120. This did not alarm me much, as in the course of my practice I had seen several of these cases. The preliminary treatment was simple as A B C; at all cost sleep must be obtained.

Fortunately, I had a well-stocked medicine-chest. In a few minutes I had prepared the strongest dose of opium which I dared to administer. In such a case as the present I knew that no driblets would avail; so I measured out no less than sixty drops of laudanum. Sleep the girl must have. That poor seething, boiling brain must by artificial means be forced to rest for hours. After that rest I should be able to say what chance there was of saving life and reason.

But preparing a dose of medicine, and making a patient like this take it, are two different things. I tried every art, every persuasion. I implored and commanded. I threatened and insisted. Philippa was obdurate. Poor soul! she knew I meant to poison her. On my part, I knew that unless she swallowed that narcotic to-night, her case was all but hopeless.

I rested for a while; then I sent for lukewarm water. After some resistance she suffered me to bathe her throbbing temples. The refreshing coolness which followed the operation was so grateful to her that she let me repeat the action again and again. A softer and more contented look settled on her beautiful face.

I seized the moment. Once more I pressed the potion upon her. This time successfully. My heart trembled with joy as I saw her swallow the drug. Now she might be saved!

I still continued the comforting laving of her temples, and waited until the drug took its due effect. By and by that moment came. The large dark eyes closed, the weary head sank heavily on my shoulder, and I knew that Philippa had entered upon a term of merciful oblivion.

I waited until her sleep was sound as the sleep of death; then I summoned my man. I had already told him that my sister was very ill. Between us we bore her to her room and laid her on the bed. I loosened her dress, cut the wet boots from her cold feet; did all I could to promote warmth and such comfort as was possible under the circumstances. Then I left her, sleeping that heavy sleep which I prayed might last unbroken for hours, and hours, and hours.

CHAPTER V.

A WHITE TOMB.

FROM the moment when the true state of Philippa's mind flashed upon me, to the moment when I left her sleeping that heavy sleep, I had little time to think of anything else than the best means of saving her life, and, if possible, her reason. True, throughout the whole of my operations to effect this end, a dim sort of horror pervaded me—a recollection of the ghastly object which lay on the roadside, some three miles from us; but it was not until I turned from my patient's door that the terrible situation in which she was placed presented itself to me in all its dread entirety. Half broken-hearted, I threw myself wearily into my chair, and covered my face with my hands.

What was to be done? What was to be done? To-morrow morning the body would be found. I felt certain that when inquiry was made suspicion would at once point toward Philippa. Mrs. Wilson knew of her starting from home in the evening, alone and on foot. She knew, moreover, that Sir Mervyn Ferrand was her husband; that he had ill-used her. She would most certainly know to whom Philippa had fled. It did not follow that because I was ignorant as to who were my neighbors they knew nothing about me. At any rate, William, my man, would know the truth. So far as I could see, to-morrow or, by the latest, the next day Philippa would be arrested for the crime. Most probably, I should also be included in the arrest. For that I seemed to care nothing; except that it might hinder me from helping my poor girl.

Any hope of removing Philippa—there, put it in plain words—any hope of flight, for days, even weeks, was vain. Let everything go as well as can be in such cases, the girl must be kept in seclusion and quiet for at least a fortnight or three weeks. I groaned as I thought of what would happen if Philippa was arrested and carried before the magistrates, accused of the awful crime. From that moment until the day of her death she would be insane.

Yet, what help was there for it? The moment the deed is known—the moment Mrs. Wilson learns that Sir Mervyn Ferrand has been found shot through the heart, she will let it be known that Lady Ferrand is at hand; and Lady Ferrand, who has been passing under the name of Mrs. Farmer, will be sought and found. And then—and then?

Even if she did not die at once—even if she recovered—oh, the shame of the trial! No jury could or would convict her: but for Philippa, my queen, to stand in the dock, to plead for her life; to know that, whether convicted or acquitted, the deed was done by her; to know that all England is talking of her wrongs and her vengeance—horrible! horrible! It shall never be. Rather will I give her a draught of opium heavy enough to close her eyes forever. There will be plenty more of the drug left for me!

Fool that I was! Why did I do things by halves? Why, for her sake, did I not hide the dead man where none would find him? Why did I not rifle his pockets, so that suspicion should have pointed to a vulgar murderer; some one who had killed him for mere plunder? Why did I not, at least, destroy any letters or papers which were about him? Identification might then have been rendered difficult, and perhaps been delayed for weeks. In that time I might have saved her.

Why do I not do this now? I started to my feet; then sank back into my chair. No; not even for Philippa's sake could I go again to that spot. If I did so, I should return as mad as she is now.

Not being able to bring myself to adopt the gruesome alternative, I could do nothing save wait events—nothing, at least, to avert the consequences of her delirious act.

But for her something must be done. How could she, in her frenzied state, be left here—her only companions two men? Nurses must be at once procured. I summoned William, and told him he must go to London by the first train in the morning.

William would have received my instructions to go to the Antipodes with imperturbability. He merely expressed a doubt as to whether any one would be able to get to London to-morrow on account of the snow. I walked to the window and looked out.

The night was still one mad whirl of snow-flakes. The window-panes were half covered by such as managed to find a resting-place there. As I watched what I could see of the wild white dance, I found myself thinking that by now that dead man on the road must be covered an inch—must have lost shape and outline. I shivered as I turned away.

"They are sure to keep the line to town open," I said. "If you can get to Roding, you can get to London."

"Oh, I can get to Roding right enough!" said William.

Then I told him what he was to do. He was to take a letter to one of the Nursing Institutions, and bring back two nurses with him. No matter what the weather was when they reached Roding, they were to come to my house at once, even if they had to hire twenty horses to drag them there. He was also to get me a few drugs which I might want.

William said no more. He nodded, to show that he understood me; and I knew that if it were possible to do my bidding it would be done.

Of his own accord he then brought me food. I ate, for I knew that I should want all my strength to support the anxieties of the next day or two.

I stayed up the whole night. Oh, that awful night! shall I ever forget it? The solitude—the raging snow-storm outside—the poor creature to whose side I crept noislessly every half an hour. She lay there with a face like marble, calm and beautiful. The long, dark lashes swept her pale cheek. The only movement was the regular rise and fall of the bosom. Oh, happy oblivion! Oh, dreaded wakening! As I looked at her, in spite of the love I bore her, I believe that, had I thought such a prayer would be answered, I should for her sake have prayed that those lashes might never again be lifted.

Morning at last broke on my dreary vigil. Philippa still slept. I returned to the sitting-room and drew back the curtains from the window. Yes; it was morning—such a morning as leaden, wintry skies can give. It was still snowing as heavily as, if not more heavily than, it had snowed last night. For twelve hours the flakes had fallen without intermission.

There was little wind now; it had dropped, I knew, about an hour ago. The world, so far as I could see, was clad in white: but the snow lay unevenly. The wind had blown it into drifts. On my garden path its depth might be counted by inches; against my garden wall by feet.

William now made his appearance. He prepared some breakfast for himself, and then, having done justice to it, started for Roding. It occurred to me that he might be the first to find the object which lay on the roadside.

Except that so doing might delay him and cause him to miss his train, this mattered little. I was now calmly awaiting the inevitable. Some one must make the discovery. However, as I wanted the nurses, I said to him:

"Remember this is life and death. Nothing must stop you." He touched his hat in a reassuring manner, and tramped off through the snow.

I returned to my patient's bedside and sat watching her, and waiting for her to awake. She had now slept for nearly eleven hours, and I knew that return to life might take place at any moment. I longed for, and yet I dreaded, her awakening. When the effects of the opiate were gone, how should I find her? Alas! I knew that the chances were a thousand to one that her brain would still be full of strange delusions; that she would turn from me, as she turned last night, with loathing and anger. But my greatest fear was that she would, upon coming to herself, or rather to her poor insane self, be conscious of the act she had accomplished. It was the fear of this which made me wish that the opium would hold her in its drowsy grasp for hours longer.

This wish was granted. Hour after hour I sat by her motionless form. Now and again I glanced from the beautiful, senseless face, and looking out of the window saw the snow still falling. Would my messenger ever be able to reach town; if he did so, would he be able to return? I was bound to have a woman's aid. The presence of the roughest daughter of the plough would be welcome to me when Philippa awoke. And it was now time she did so.

Although I felt her pulse almost every other minute, and could find no reason for alarm, I am bound to say that her long sleep, protracted far beyond any I had in my experience seen produced by the exhibition of narcotics, rendered me very uneasy. I shall, I am sure, scarcely be credited when I say that Philippa's unconsciousness lasted for sixteen hours—from half-past nine at night to half-past one on the following afternoon. I began then to think the duration abnormal, and determined to take some steps toward arousing her.

But I was spared the responsibility. She stirred on the couch. Her head turned languidly on the pillow. Her dark eyes opened, closed, and opened again. She looked at me in a dazed manner, not at first seeming to know me, or to understand why I was near her, or where she was. A prey to the wildest anxiety, I leaned over her, and waited until she spoke.

Little by little her bewilderment seemed to leave her. Her eyes rested with curious inquiry upon mine. "Basil," she said, faintly, but in a tone of surprise, "you here! Where am I?"

"Under my roof—your brother's roof," I said.

"Ah! I remember," she said, with a deep sigh. Then she closed her eyes, and once more seemed to sleep.

What did she remember? It seemed to me too great a mercy to expect that those hours of oblivion had effected a cure, but my hope was that she did not remember what had happened when she met Sir Mervyn Ferrand on the road. I was almost trembling with excitement. I was longing to really know in what state her mind was. Besides, I thought she had slept as long as was good for her. I took her hands and called her by name.

Once more she opened her eyes. They expressed no fear of me, no dislike to me. They conveyed no reproach. They were calm, sad, weary, but gave no evidence of any mental disorder.

"Have I been ill long, Basil?" she asked.

"Not very long. You are going to get better soon.

"I came to your house, did I not?"

"Yes; and here I mean to keep you. Do you feel weak?"

"Very weak. Basil, I have dreamed such horrible things."

"You have been feverish and delirious. People like that always fancy strange things."

She was indeed as weak as a child; but for the time, at least, she was perfectly sane. I could have cried for joy as I heard her faint but collected words. I ventured to hope that I had before me one of those very rare cases—such as I had seen described, but had not as yet met with—where the patient awakes from the long, artificially produced sleep perfectly free from all maniacal symptoms. If this were so with Philippa, if the return of reason were to be permanent, I knew that a few weeks' careful nursing and judicious treatment might quite restore her to health. Even as this comforting thought came to me, I remembered the peril in which she stood. To-morrow—ay, even to-day—the thing which I dreaded might happen, and sweep away all the good the narcotic had done her.

She was now fully awake, and perfectly quiet. I gave her some refreshment; then seeing she was lying in peaceful silence, I thought it better to leave her. As I quitted her room I drew down the blind, fearing that the whirling snow might bring recollections which it was my one wish to keep from invading her mind.

The long dreary day wore away. The light faded, and another night began. Philippa still lay calm, silent, and almost apathetic. I did nothing to rouse her. I went to her side as seldom as possible. I feared that her seeing me might recall the events of the last night, and that recollections so awakened might destroy all the good which I felt sure had been accomplished by the long hours of oblivion and quiet. Could I have deputed the task to another, I would not have even shown myself to my patient. Most anxiously, as evening came, I awaited the appearance of my faithful William and the nurses.

Would they be able to reach us in such weather? It was still snowing fiercely. For more than twenty-four hours the mad white revel had continued without intermission. Indeed, that storm which burst upon the world as I turned from Philippa's house on the preceding night is now historical; it was the beginning of the heaviest and the longest fall which the record of fifty years can show. For two nights and a day the snow came down in what may almost be called drifting masses. During that dismal day I saw from the window the heaps against the wall grow deeper and deeper, and even in my preoccupied state of mind found myself marvelling at the sustained fury of the storm.

At eleven o'clock at night I sadly gave up all hope of the much-needed assistance arriving. After all, it seemed that William had found it impossible to fight against the weather; so I made my preparations for another night of solitary watchfulness. I was all but worn out with fatigue; yet I dared not sleep. If the mania returned, what might happen, were I not at hand to restrain Philippa's actions? My hope that the madness had really left my patient, not, if she were properly treated, to return, was a growing one, but not yet strong enough to allow me to leave her for any length of time.

My delight then may be imagined when, looking for the hundredth time up the road, I saw close at hand two flashing lights, and knew that William, the faithful, had done my bidding. In a few minutes two respectable women from one of the best of the London Nursing Institutions were within my walls.

The train had, of course, been late, very late. At one or two places on the line it had almost given up the battle, and settled down quietly until dug out; but steam and iron had conquered, and at last it did get to Roding. There William, knowing my dire necessity, offered such a magnificent bribe that he soon found an enterprising carriage proprietor who was willing to make the attempt to force two horses and a carriage over the six miles of road between Roding and my house. The attempt was successful, although the rate of progression was slow; and William triumphantly ushered his charges into my presence.

After giving them time for rest and refreshment, I explained the nature of the case, set out the treatment I wished to be adopted, and then led them to Philippa. I left the poor girl in their charge for the night, then went to take the sleep of which I stood so much in need.

But before going to bed I saw William. I dreaded to hear him say what gruesome sight he had seen that morning; yet I was bound to learn if the deed had yet been made public.

"Did you manage to get to Roding all right this morning?" I asked with assumed carelessness.

"I managed all right, sir," said William, cheerfully.

"Snow deep on the road?"

"Not so deep as I fancied 'twould be. All drifted and blown up to one side, like. I never seen such a thing. Drift must have been feet deep this morning. What must it be now, I wonder? Something like the arctic regions, I should think, sir!"

For the first time for hours and hours, a ray of hope flashed across me. William had walked that lonely road this morning, and noticed nothing except the drifted snow! I remembered how I had placed the dead man in the little hollow at the bottom of the bank. Could it be that the kindly, merciful snow, which I have already described as beginning to form in a winding-sheet, had hidden and buried him? That a pure white, shapeless heap, which told no tales, concealed for a while the dark deed from the world? Oh that Philippa were well enough to leave this place to-morrow! We might fly and leave no trace behind us. She might never know what she had done in her madness. The fearful secret would be mine alone. A burden it would be, but one which I might easily find strength enough to bear. Bear it! I could bear it, and be happy; for something told me that, could I but save her from the peril which menaced her, Philippa and I would part no more in this world until death, the only conqueror of such love as mine, swept us asunder.

Once more I looked out into the night. Still the snow-flakes whirled down. Oh, brave, kind snow! Fall, fall, fall! Pile the masses on the dead wretch. Hide him deep in your bosom. Fall for weeks, for months, forever! Save my love and me!

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET KEPT.

IT is needless to say that when I awoke the next morning my first thought was of Philippa: but my first action was to go to my window and look at the skies. My heart sank within me as I saw that the snow had ceased falling, and the wintry sun was shining. I threw up the sash; the cold air cut me like a knife. I gathered up a handful of snow from the window-sill. It crumbled in my fingers like tooth-powder. I guessed at once that a hard black frost had succeeded the snow. I ran downstairs and glanced at my thermometer outside my sitting-room window. It registered twelve degrees of frost. My spirits rose; I felt that Philippa would be saved. The wind was due east: so long as it stayed there the frost would last, and that white tomb on the roadside hide the secret of the dreadful night.

I found, moreover, that Philippa's condition was all that could, under the circumstances, be hoped for. Since she had awakened from that long sleep into which the opiate had plunged her, there had been no recurrence of the delusions; no symptoms which gave me any alarm. She was, of course, weak in body, but quite quiet and collected. She spoke but little, and the few words which she did speak had no bearing on forbidden or disturbing subjects.

Day after day went by, and still the brave black frost held the world in its iron grip, and kept the secret of the night. Morning after morning I woke to find the wind still blowing from the east, the skies clear and showing every evidence of a long spell of hard weather. A presentiment that we should be saved was now firmly established in my mind. The heavens themselves seemed to be shielding us and working for us.

I have not given the year in which these things occurred; but many who can remember that mighty fall of snow, and the time which the frost kept it on the earth, will be able to fix the date. Since that year there has been no weather like it.

Day by day Philippa grew better and stronger. I spare you, as I promised to, all description which is not absolutely necessary of my treatment of my patient, and all technical summary of the case; but before many days had gone by I knew that, as I hoped, I had to deal with one of those rare instances in which the balance of the mind is restored by forced sleep, and the complete restoration of health is but a matter of time and care.

As soon as it became a certainty that all danger to life or reason was at an end, I began to consider what course to adopt. The moment she was well enough to risk the journey, or even, if a thaw set in, before then, Philippa must fly from the scene of the tragedy in which she had played so terrible, yet morally irresponsible, a part. We must put lands and seas between ourselves and the fatal spot. But how to persuade her that such flight was absolutely necessary? Brother and sister as we now termed ourselves, would she ever consent to accompany me abroad? Had I the right to put the woman I loved in such an equivocal position?

No! a thousand times no! And yet I knew there was no safety for her in England; and with whom could she leave England save with me?

I dared not urge upon her my true reason for flight. It was my greatest hope that the events of that night had left her mind when the madness left her, never to be recalled. And now time was pressing; ten days had passed by. The glorious frost still kept our counsel, but it could not last forever. The time must come when the white heaps of snow would melt and vanish away, and then Sir Mervyn Ferrand's cold dead face would appear, and tell the tale of his death to the first passer-by.

I had scarcely quitted the house since that night. Yet one day a kind of morbid fascination had led me to walk along the road toward Roding, and to halt at what I judged to be the spot where I laid the dead man by the side of the road. I fancied I could single out the very drift under which that awful thing lay, and a dreary temptation to probe the white heap with my stick and make sure assailed me. I resisted it, and turned away from the spot.

There was a certain amount of traffic on the road. By now the snow had been beaten down by cart-wheels and people's feet, so that it was quite possible to walk from one place to another. As I reached the house from which Philippa fled to seek refuge with me, I encountered Mrs. Wilson. I was going to pass without any sign of recognition, but she stopped me.

"I thought you were going to take your sister away?" she said.

"Lady Ferrand was unfortunately taken very ill when she left you. She is now hardly well enough to be removed."

"Has she heard from Sir Mervyn?" asked Mrs. Wilson, abruptly.

"Not to my knowledge," I replied.

"It is strange. You know, I suppose, that he was expected at my house that night?"

"Certainly I do. It was for that reason my sister left you."

Mrs. Wilson looked at me thoughtfully. "She will not meet him again?"

"Never," I said, thinking as I spoke that my words bore a meaning only known to myself.

"Does she hate him?" she asked, suddenly.

"She has been cruelly wronged," I said, evasively.

She laid her hand on my arm. "Listen," she said. "If I thought she hated him, I would see her before she leaves, and tell her something. If I thought he hated her, I would tell him. I will wait and see."

She turned away and walked on, leaving me to make the best of her enigmatical words. She was evidently a strange woman, and I felt more sure than ever was in some way mixed up with Sir Mervyn Ferrand's early life. I had a great mind to follow her and demand an explanation, but caution told me that the less I said to her the better. It was from this woman's knowledge of the relationship between Philippa and the dead man that, when the secret of the night was laid bare, the greatest danger must arise.

After walking a few paces, Mrs. Wilson turned and came back to me. "Give me an address," she said; "I may want to write to you."

I hesitated; then I told her that any letters sent to my bankers in London would reach me sooner or later. It was too soon to excite suspicion by concealment of one's movements.

It was after I had gazed at that white tomb by the roadside that my impatience to remove Philippa grew fiercer and fiercer. Moreover, I had at last made up my mind what to do with my precious charge. As soon as she was well enough to bear the journey, I resolved to take her to London, and place her in the hands of one of the truest, noblest, tenderest women in the world, my mother.

She was in London, waiting for me to join her. I had written, telling her that the serious illness of a friend prevented me from leaving my home for some days. Now I resolved to go to her and tell her all Philippa's sad tale—all save the one dark chapter of which she herself, I hoped, knew nothing. I would take her to my mother. I would tell my mother how I loved her; I would appeal to her love for me, and ask her to take my poor stricken girl to her heart, even as she would take a daughter; and I dared to hope that, if only for my sake, my prayer would be granted.

Philippa was by now thoroughly convalescent. As I lay down my pen for a moment and think of that time, with its fears and troubles, it is a marvel to me that I could have dared to wait so long before moving her from the neighborhood. I can only attribute my lingering to the sense of fatality that all would go right, or to the professional instinct which forbade me urging a patient to do anything which might retard recovery; but the time had at last come.

Save for her quiet and subdued manner, my love was almost her old self again. Her words and manner to me were tender, affectionate, and sisterly. I need hardly say that during that time no word crossed my lips which I would have recalled. Love, if not the thought of it, I had laid aside until happier days dawned; for—I say it advisedly, and at risk of censure—Philippa was to me pure and innocent as on the day when first we met. If her hands were stained with the blood of Sir Mervyn Ferrand, she knew it not. Her wrongs had goaded her to madness, and her madness was responsible for the act, not she herself.

The man's name never crossed her lips. For all she spoke of him he might never have existed, or, at the most, been but a part of a forgotten dream. As soon as she was well enough to rise from her bed, and I could for hours enjoy her society, we talked of many things; but never of Sir Mervyn Ferrand and the immediate past.

But, nevertheless, there were times when her look distressed me. Now and again I found her gazing at me with anxious, troubled eyes, as if trying to read something which I was hiding from her. Once she asked me how she came to my house that night.

"Out of the whirling snow," I said as lightly as I could. "You came in a high state of fever and delirium."

"Where had I been? What had I been doing?"

"You came straight from Mrs. Wilson's, I suppose. I know no more."

Then she sighed and turned her head away; but I soon found her troubled dark eyes again fixed on my own. I could do nothing but meet their gaze bravely, and pray that my poor love might never, never be able to fill those hours which were at present a blank to her.

At last, exactly a fortnight from the fatal day, we left my home. I was now what is legally termed an accessory after the act, and was making every effort to save the poor girl from justice. In order to avert suspicion, I decided it was better not to shut up my house; so I left the faithful William to take care of it, and await my instructions. At present it was advisable that any inquirers should learn that I had gone to London with my sister, and that the time of our return was uncertain. By and by, if all went well, I could get rid of my cottage in an ordinary way. I, for one, should never wish to visit the place again.

Philippa acquiesced in all my arrangements. She was quite willing to accompany me to town. She trusted me with childish simplicity. "But, Basil, afterward—what afterward?" she asked.

Even in the midst of the menacing peril it was all I could do to refrain from kneeling at her feet and telling her that my love would solve the question of the future.

"I have a surprise for you in London," I said, as cheerfully as I could. "Trust yourself to me; you will not regret it."

She took my hand. "Whom else have I to trust?" she said simply. "Basil, you have been very good to me. I have made your life miserable; it is too late to atone; but I shall never forget these days."

Her eyes were full of tears. I kissed her hand reverently, and told her that when I saw the old smile back upon her lips, all I had done would be a thousand times repaid; but as I spoke I trembled at the thought of what might be in store for both of us.

We drove to Roding, and were perforce obliged to take the road which passed by Mrs. Wilson's house. Philippa half rose from her seat, and seemed to be on the point of asking me some question; but she changed her mind, and relapsed into silence. I felt a horrible dread lest the roadside objects and landmarks should awaken recollection, and my heart beat violently as we neared the white heap by the hedge, that heap which I believed held our secret. I felt that I grew deadly pale. I was forced to turn my head away and look out of the opposite window. My state of mind was not made easier by knowing that Philippa was gazing at me with that troubled look in her eyes. Altogether I felt that the strain was becoming too much for me, and I began to wonder if my life would ever again know a happy or secure moment.

After a long silence Philippa spoke. "Tell me, Basil, have you heard from that man?"

I shook my head.

"Where is he? He was coming that night. Did he come?"

"I suppose not. Why do you ask?"

"Basil, a kind of horrible dream haunts me. There was something I dreamed of that fearful night, something I dream of now. Tell me what it was."

The perspiration rose to my brow. "Dearest," I said, "no wonder you dream. You are well now, but that night you were quite out of your senses. Your fancies are but the remains of that delirium. Think no more of that wretch; he is probably living in Paris, after the manner of his kind. Think only that life is going to be calm and happy."

Anything to keep the knowledge of her fatal act from her! I forced myself to talk in a light, cheerful manner. I jested at the appearance of the few muffled-up country people whom we passed on the road. I pointed out the beauty of the trees on the wayside, each branch of which bore foliage of glistening snow. I did all I could to turn her thoughts into other channels—to drive that strange questioning look from her eyes. Right glad I felt when we were at last in the train, and the first stage of our flight an accomplished fact.

Upon reaching London, I drove straight to the hotel at which my mother was staying. It was one of those high-priced respectable private hotels in Jermyn Street. I engaged rooms for my sister and myself. I sent Philippa to her room to rest, and then went to find my mother. In another minute I was in her arms, and ere half an hour was over I had told her Philippa's story, and my love for the woman on whose behalf I besought her protection.

Yes, I had done right to trust to her. I knew her noble nature; her utter freedom from the petty trammels of society. I knew the love she bore her son. Let me here thank her once more for what she did for me that day.

She heard all my outpourings in silence. I told her all, save two things—the name of the man who had wronged my love, and the fate which had overtaken him. I told her, as I have told you, how I had loved—how I loved Philippa; how I now dared to hope that in time to come my love would be rewarded. I prayed her to take my poor girl to her heart, and by treating her as a daughter restore, if it were possible, her self-respect.

My mother heard me. Her sweet face grew a shade paler. Her lips quivered, and the tears stood in her eyes. I knew all that was passing through her mind. I knew how proud she was of me, and what great things she had hoped I should do in the world. She was a woman, and, woman-like, had counted upon her son's bettering himself by marriage; but, in spite of all this, I knew I was right in counting upon her aid. Once again, my sweet mother, I thank you.

She rose. "Let me see the woman you love. Where is she? I will go to her."

"She is here, in this house. Ah, mother, I knew you would do this for me."

She kissed my forehead. "Bring her to me," she said.

I went out, and sent word to Philippa that I wanted her. She soon came to me. She had removed the stains of travel, and, although pale, looked the perfection of graceful beauty. I led her to my mother's room. She stopped short as she saw it was tenanted by a lady. A quick blush crossed her cheek.

"Philippa, dearest," I said, "this is my mother. I have told her all, and she is waiting to welcome you."

Still she stood motionless, save that her head bent down and her bosom heaved. My mother came to her side, and, placing her kind arms round her, whispered some words which I neither heard nor tried to hear. Philippa broke into a storm of sobs, and for some moments wept on my mother's shoulder.

Then she raised her head and looked at me, and my heart leaped at the expression in her tearful eyes. "Basil, my brother, you are too good to me!" she ejaculated.

My mother led her to the sofa, and, with her arms still round her, sat down by her side. I left them, knowing that my love had now the truest, noblest heart to sob against; the quickest, most sympathetic ear to listen to the tale of her wrongs; and the softest, kindest voice to soothe and console her.

Ah! how happy I should have felt, could that one night's dark work have been undone—could that white tomb forever hold its ghastly secret!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MELTING OF THE SNOW.

THE first stage of our flight toward safety accomplished, I sat down to once more review the situation, and to take such counsel as I could give myself. I endeavored to foreshadow the consequences of the inevitable discovery of Sir Mervyn Ferrand's death. I tried calmly to ascertain in what quarter the danger of discovery was situated, and how best to guard against or turn aside the peril.

Undoubtedly the chief person to fear was Mrs. Wilson. She alone knew that the man intended to reach Roding that night. She alone knew in what relation, or supposed relation, he stood to Philippa. The very night of his death would be fixed by the snow-storm; and I felt sure that as soon as the dead man was identified Mrs. Wilson could not fail to associate her guest's sudden departure and subsequent illness with the terrible event. The moment she revealed what she knew or suspected, suspicion must point to the right person, and pursuit must at once follow. My heart grew sick, as, think how I would, I could see no loop-hole by which to escape from this danger.

About secondary things I troubled but little. Upon calm reconsideration, I did not believe that my stolid William would for a moment jump at the right conclusion. If he were led to suspect either of us, it would be me, not Philippa; and I well knew that he was so much attached to me that, although he felt certain I had done the deed, he would feel equally certain that I had good and proper reasons for doing it, and no word to my detriment would pass his reticent lips. No, there was little to fear from William.

I had blamed myself deeply for the impulse which had urged me to hurl the fatal weapon away. Why did I not keep it and bury it fathoms deep? If that pistol were found, it would possibly furnish a clew which might be followed up, and undo everything. My only hope was that I had thrown it to some spot where it might lie for years undiscovered, until all association between it and the murder had disappeared.

To sum up briefly, I was bound to decide that the damning circumstantial evidence which could be furnished by Mrs. Wilson drove me back to my original idea. There was no chance of my poor Philippa's remaining unaccused or unsuspected of the deed she had unwittingly done; so her only hope of safety—indeed, considering all, I may also say my only hope of safety—was rapid flight. We must gain some land in which we could dwell without fear of being arrested. What land was there?

Many a one. The date of my story is before 1873, when nearly all the extradition treaties were made. At that time such treaties existed with only two foreign countries, France and the United States; so that our choice of a resting-place was not so limited as those who are flying from the clutches of the law find it to-day. However, in order to make certain, I paid a visit to a legal friend of mine, and, by quoting a supposititious case, managed to acquire a good deal of information respecting the dealings of one nation with another, so far as fugitives were concerned.

I found that although, with the two exceptions above named, there was no settled international law on the subject, there was a kind of unwritten substitute, which was known by the name of the Comity of Nations. Under this code of courtesy, a notorious criminal, who had sought refuge in the arms of another country, was not uncommonly, although there was no law under which he could be arrested, given up to his pursuers, by being simply driven across the frontier of the country in which he had hoped to find security. However, I gathered that this so-called comity was scarcely expected to be exercised by the most friendly state, unless the fugitive had fled almost red-handed, and so placed his guilt beyond doubt. No one exactly knew how far this obliging expulsion might be counted upon. It was generally supposed to be decided by the amount of influence or persuasion which one government exercised on the other.

This information rather upset my preconceived ideas as to the ease with which safety might be obtained; but reflection told me I had little to fear. The case against Philippa could be nothing more than one of suspicion. No one, not even I myself, had seen the deed done. A warrant would, no doubt, be issued for her arrest; but if our flight precluded its execution, I did not believe that any government would put itself out of the way to aid the English law. There was no one, save myself, who could positively swear that Sir Mervyn Ferrand had been killed by Philippa.

I learned that Spain was then, even as it is now, the land safest against English law. Perhaps the reason is that the grave, yet at times hot-blooded, Spaniard reckons human life at a lower value than more northerly nations. Anyway, it was to Spain that I turned my eyes; Spain that I resolved to reach without an hour's unenforced delay.

The very next day I broached the subject of foreign travel to my mother. Although so short a time had passed since they first met, I was overjoyed to see the terms upon which she and Philippa stood. The girl seemed to cling to her as to a natural protector—seemed ready to install her in the place of the mother she had lost. After all, the love of her own sex is indispensable to a woman's happiness. It did my heart good to see the two together. Philippa talked to my mother as she had never yet talked to me; and I knew that when the day came upon which I should ask for the only reward I wanted, my mother's kindness to the forsaken and shame-stricken girl would be an advocate that pleaded strongly in favor of my suit.

But could it ever be? Could we know happiness in the face of that dark night's work? Ah me! my heart sank as I thought that any day might bring the crushing blow. Let there be no delay. Let me not blame myself hereafter for any negligence or false security. Let us away from the peril.

"Mother," I said, "will you come abroad with Philippa and me?"

"Abroad, Basil! I have only just come home."

"No matter; come with us at once. Let us go to some place where there is warmth and bright sunshine. Let us go to Spain."

"Spain! why Spain? Besides, surely Philippa is not fit for a long journey!"

"It will do her good. Her recollections of this country are but sad ones."

"Well, in a week or two I will see about it."

"No, at once. Let us start to-morrow or the next day. Mother, I ask it as a favor."

"Give me some good reason, Basil, and I will do as you wish."

"Look at me, and you will see the reason. Cannot you see that I am ill, worn out, nervous? I must have a change, and at once."

She gazed at me with solicitude. "Yes, I know you are not well; but why Spain?"

"A whim—a sick man's fancy. Perhaps because it is Philippa's father's country put it into my head. Mother, tell me, how do you like her?"

"She is the woman you love; she is very beautiful; she has been cruelly treated; she is blameless; to say more after so short an acquaintance would be exaggeration."

"You will come to Spain with me—with her?"

She kissed me and gave in to my whim. Then I sought Philippa.

"My mother is going to take us abroad," I said with a smile, which was forced, as all my smiles now were. "She will see to everything for you."

"She is kind—she is sweet," said Philippa, clasping her hands. "Basil, I am beginning to worship your mother. But why are we going abroad?"

"To get away from sad thoughts, for one thing; for another, because I feel ill."

She gave me a quick look of apprehension which brought the flush to my cheek. "Oh, let us go at once!" she cried. "Let us leave this land of ice and I will nurse you and make you well. Where are we going? When are we going?"

"To Spain—to-morrow or the next day."

She looked at me with the troubled gaze which I had so often noticed. "Basil," she said, "you are doing this for my sake."

"And my own, I fear."

"I threw away your love—I spoiled your life. I came to you a shamed woman. You saved me! You did not scorn me. You brought me to your mother's arms. Basil, may God requite you: I never can."

She burst into tears, and left the room hastily.

It was well I settled the matter of the foreign journey then. That afternoon the wind changed and a thaw set in—a thaw that slowly but surely drew away the thick white veil which covered the whole of England.

That night I had little sleep. I could do nothing but lie awake and picture that white tomb slowly melting away, until the white face beneath peered out of it and made the dread secret known to all. Who would be the first to discover it? Doubtless some country man or woman passing that way in the gray of the morning. I drew pictures of the discoverer's horror—the shriek of terror he or she would give. I scarcely dared to close my eyes; for I knew that if I dreamed, my dreams would take me to stand over the snowdrift, and force me to watch it melting away! It seemed to me that until Philippa was out of the range of pursuit I should not sleep again.

Faster and faster, now it had once begun, the thaw went on. Warm wind, heavy rain the next day, helped it. That tremendous fall of snow had, indeed, been the last effort of the winter. I dreaded what I might see in the morning's papers.

For it was the third day from that on which I spoke about going abroad; yet we were still in London. When it really came to making preparations for the projected trip, there were a thousand and one things to be done. There was the needful passport to be obtained; my mother had many purchases to make for both Philippa and herself. She was now fully contented with the prospect of a long sojourn on the continent; but she liked travelling in comfort, and objected very much to being hurried. So it was that, in spite of the pressing need for immediate flight, we were still in London.

The dangerous delay made me nervous, excitable, and ill-tempered. This state of mind was not without benefit to our cause, as my manner as well as my looks fully convinced my mother that my own health was the sole object of the journey. So, like a good creature, she set to work in thorough earnest to get everything ready for our departure.

To-morrow morning we were to start. I prayed Heaven that it might not be too late; that the next twenty-four hours might pass without what I dreaded taking place. For I knew that by now that ghastly object on the roadside must be lying with the light of day on its pale face!

With an effort I opened the morning's paper, and ran hastily up and down the columns. What cared I for politics, foreign news, or money-market intelligence? Here was the one paragraph which riveted all my attention. The white tomb had given up its secret! Read! To me those words were written in letters of fire!

"Horrible Discovery near Roding.—The melting of the snow has brought to light what to all appearances is a fearful crime. Yesterday afternoon a laborer walking on the highway discovered the body of a gentleman lying by the roadside. His death had been caused by a pistol-shot. It is supposed that it must have occurred on the night of the great snow-storm, and that the body has lain ever since under the snow, which had drifted to the depth of some feet. The facts that death must have been instantaneous, and that no weapon can be found near the spot, do away with the theory of suicide. Letters and papers found upon the corpse tend to show it to be that of Sir Mervyn Ferrand, Bart. The unfortunate gentleman's friends have been communicated with, and the inquest will be opened to-morrow."

For some minutes I sat like one stunned. Inevitable as it was that the discovery should be made, the shock seemed scarcely lightened by the foreknowledge; the danger seemed no less terrible. Oh, that we had started yesterday—were even to start to-day! What might not happen before to-morrow morning! My first impulse was to go to my mother and beg her to hasten our departure; but reflection showed me how unwise this course would be. I should alarm her—alarm Philippa! I could give no reason. My one longing was to keep the news from my poor love. Let her read that paragraph, and who could answer for the consequences? Looking as a medical man at her case, I knew that there was something about that night which troubled her; some dream, or semblance of dream, to which, fortunately, she could as yet give no coherence. Let her learn that Sir Mervyn Ferrand had ever since that night been lying dead where she met him, the fearful truth must come to her. No! not a word to excite her suspicion. My task was a twofold one. I had to save her not only from what I suppose I must call justice, but also from herself. It seemed to me that the latter was the hardest part of my work; but I would do it—I swore I would do it. I would keep watch and ward, to see that nothing reached her—that she heard nothing which could awaken memories of those mercifully absent hours.

I tore the paper to pieces and burned it. I think of all my dark days that one was the one I would be least willing to pass again. I trembled at every footstep on the stairs. Any man who paused for a moment outside our windows sent a cold chill over me. And in the midst of my misery I had to wear a cheerful face, and talk to Philippa and my mother about the pleasures of our projected journey! Ah! if we only reached the end of it in safety, the pleasure would not be altogether imaginary.

Once again I say, if you cannot feel with me, throw my tale aside. Heaven knows it is a sombre one! I was breaking the law; concealing what the law calls a crime; doing all I could to save the criminal. But the criminal was Philippa, and I loved her! I myself would have stood face to face with Sir Mervyn Ferrand, and have freely given my own life if I could have assured his dying like the dog he was. Why then should I blame Philippa, who had done in her temporary madness what I would have done in cold blood? Yet why trouble to extenuate? I loved her! Those words sum up everything.

The morning dawned. No fatal messenger had arrived. I glanced hastily at the papers, which, however, contained no more information about the tragedy. Shortly after ten o'clock we started to drive to Charing Cross. The rattle of wheels over the stones seemed to send fresh life through my veins. We were off on the road to safety.

We started in plenty of time, as I wished to call at my bankers' on the way. It was my intention to take with me a large sum in gold. Notes of any kind could be traced, but the bright sovereigns would tell no tale. I changed my check, and while doing so asked if there were any letters for me. Several persons addressed letters to me at my bankers'. The spruce cashier sent to inquire, and, with my bag of gold, passed under the brass-wire railing a letter with a woman's handwriting on the envelope. I thrust it into my pocket, to read at my leisure.

We travelled by the tidal train for Paris, *via* Folkestone and Boulogne. It was not the pleasantest weather in the world for a journey; but I wrapped my charges up warmly, and did all I could to mitigate the hardships of the voyage, undertaken ostensibly for the sake of my health. My mother, who was by now an experienced and seasoned traveller, settled herself down to the journey, although she little guessed how short the rest I meant to give her until we reached our destination. She laughingly protested against the cruelty of dragging an old woman like herself away from England just as she had returned to it; but there was that in her voice and manner which told me she would for my sake make a far greater sacrifice of comfort than this.

I thought that Philippa's spirits, like mine, rose as we left London behind us. She smiled at my sallies and feeble attempts at making merry, which, now that we were fairly on our road to safety, were not quite so forced as they had been during the last few days. She listened with interest to the pictures I drew—imaginary ones, of course—of the beauties of the south; and I was glad to believe that the thought of visiting what might almost be called her native land was beginning to awaken her interest. Only let me be able to show her that life could still promise a pleasant future, and the moody memories of the past months might be banished forever.

I am sure that no one who could have seen us that morning would have dreamed that out of that party of three, consisting of a comfortable, pleasant-looking English matron, a strangely beautiful girl, and myself, two were flying from the hands of justice. Our appearance was certainly such as to disarm all suspicion.

"But where are we going?" asked my mother. "I object to go wandering about without knowing where our pilgrimage is to end."

"We are going to Paris first, then to Spain—to wherever we can find the warmth and sunshine which is necessary to my existence. If we can't find them in Spain, we will cross over to Africa, and, if needful, go down to the Equator."

"Then you young people will have to go alone. I draw the line of my good-nature at Europe."

I glanced at Philippa. Her long curved lashes hid her eyes; but a tell-tale blush was on her cheek. I knew that the day was not so very distant when she would answer my appeal as I wished. I knew that, could I but sweep away the record of that one night, all might yet be well with her. Oh, that she may never recall what I alone know!

As we were nearing Folkestone I remembered the letter which had been given me at the bank. I drew it from my breast, intending to read it; but the sight of the Roding post-mark on the outside made me change my intention. I remembered Mrs. Wilson's half promise to send me some communication. I longed and yet I dreaded to break the seal. I felt it would be better for me to read that letter alone. Whatever might be the tenor of its contents, I was sure it had some bearing on Philippa's relations with Sir Mervyn Ferrand.

We were soon on board the steamer and under weigh. Although the Arctic rigors of the last three weeks had departed, the air on the sea was too keen to make the channel passage an enjoyable one. I persuaded my mother and Philippa to take refuge in the saloon; and then I found a quiet spot where I was able to read my letter without fear of interruption, or of betraying myself by the emotion its contents might cause. It was well I did so, for the first words blanched my cheek. The letter began abruptly, so:

"I know or guess all. I know why Sir Mervyn Ferrand did not reach my house that night. I know the reason for her strange excited state. I know why she left my home before you came to seek her. I know how he met with the death he deserved.

"Ah! she is braver than I am. She has done what years ago I swore I would do; and yet I had not the courage. I was base enough to forego revenge for the sake of the beggarly maintenance he offered me—for the sake, perhaps, of my children. I sank low enough to become his tool—to do as he bade me, even to taking under my roof the woman who thought herself his wife. Yes, she has been braver than I. But her wrongs were greater than mine; for I had but myself to blame for being in such a degraded position that he could throw me aside like an old glove. He never married me.

"Fear nothing for your sister, if she be your sister.

Tell her my lips are sealed to the death; and for the sake of her brave act tell her this:

"Sir Mervyn Ferrand's first wife *died on the* 18*th of June*, 186—, three months before the day on which he married your sister. She died at Liverpool, at No. 5 Silver Street. She was buried in the cemetery, under the name of Lucy Ferrand. She has friends alive; it will be easy to prove that she was the woman whom he married. Her maiden name was King. He hated her. They parted. He gave her a sum of money on condition that she never called herself his wife. He lost sight of her. I never did. For years I hoped she would die, and that he would marry me. She died too late for the hope to be realized. I told him of her death; but I changed the date. I would not tell him where she died. Part of his object in coming to Roding that night was, to endeavor to wring the information from me. He would never have had it. No other woman should have been his wife so long as I could stop it.

"Now that he is dead, you can tell your brave sister that she may, if she likes, take the name, title, and what wealth she can claim. Fear nothing from me; I will be silent as death."

CHAPTER VIII.

FLIGHT.

I READ the woman's letter again and again—read it with feelings in which joy and disgust were strangely mingled; but the former was the predominant sensation. In the first place, if Mrs. Wilson kept her promise of secrecy, it seemed to me that all danger of suspicion falling upon Philippa was removed. There would be no one else to make known the fact, that upon the night of Sir Mervyn's death a wronged, distracted woman left her home—a woman whose life's happiness had been clouded by the villain's treacherous act—a woman of strong passions, who in her temporary delirium might easily be turned to take such vengeance for which I, at least, held her quite unaccountable. If I could but feel sure of the silence of the one person whom I dreaded, we might even return to London, and fear nothing. I wavered. After all there is something contemptible in flight. Should I trust to Mrs. Wilson's promise, and return with my companions by the next boat from Boulogne?

No, a thousand times no! Philippa's welfare is far too precious to me to be trusted in the hands of one excitable woman—a woman, moreover, who has wrongs of her own calling for vengeance. To-morrow her mind may change, and instead of furthering our safety, she may be urging on the pursuit. Let me trust no one save myself.

For my love's sake, I was overjoyed to hear that, supposing the woman's statement and date were correct, Philippa was the dead man's lawful wife. Not that this fact for one moment palliated the guilt of his intention, or lessened the contempt and hatred I bore toward him; not that it changed in my eyes by one iota my love's position. Married or unmarried, to me she was all that a woman could be. Though a blackguard's craft had wrought what would be her shame in the eyes of the world, though her hands were unconsciously red with a man's blood, to me she was pure as a vestal, innocent as a child.

Yet for her sake the news gladdened me. I knew that if ever the time should come when I could place proofs in her hands that she was a wife—that she could, if she chose, bear her worthless husband's name, and face the world without fear of scorn, the restoration of her self-respect would bring with it a joy which only a woman can rightly comprehend. And Philippa, with all her pride and passion, was a true woman, full of the softness and delicate dread of shame which characterizes the best of her sex.

Yet when should I be able to tell her? Whenever I did so I must also reveal the fact of her husband's being dead, and my doing so must bring the whole story of his death to her knowledge. I trembled as I thought what this might mean. Surely its dramatic surroundings must suggest something to her mind—must bring back the night and its horrors; must, in fact, tell her what she had done in her madness! Rather than risk this, I must let her continue to bear the cruel weight of what she thought her shame. My aim must be to make her believe that Sir Mervyn Ferrand is still alive, and troubling nothing as to what has become of the woman whom he once falsely swore to love and cherish until death. I cursed the wretch's memory as I thought of him.

The sending of Philippa to live under the charge of one of his own discarded mistresses was but another proof of the man's revolting cynicism. Mrs. Wilson's acceptance of the charge showed me to what a level a woman could sink. It told me, moreover, that in spite of her letter she was not to be trusted. A woman who could lend herself to her former lover's purposes in such a way as this must have parted with every atom of pride. It seemed to me that the woman and the man were well matched in baseness.

Still her letter lifted a load from my mind. I felt that for a while there could be no pursuit; yet I resolved to risk nothing, but hurry on with all possible speed. Only when we crossed the frontier of Spain should I sleep in peace.

All researches, with a view to obtaining evidence of the first Lady Ferrand's death, I postponed indefinitely. Some day, if all went well, I would return to England and procure the documents necessary to prove the validity of Philippa's marriage. There was no pressing hurry. As to any money which should be hers, never with my consent should she touch a penny which had belonged to the dead man.

Protracted as my meditations seem on paper, they were in reality much longer; indeed, they were not at an end when the boat steamed in Boulogne harbor. I went in search of my companions, who, I was glad to find, had borne the voyage well. We were soon in the train, and, without any event occurring worth recording, at eight o'clock stood on the Gare du Nord, Paris.

We drove through the brightly lit streets to the Hotel du Louvre. The stains of travel washed away, my mother gave a sigh of satisfaction as she seated herself at the dinner-table. Like a sensible woman, she was no despiser of the good things of this life. There were other late diners in the great coffee-room, and many a head was turned to look at the beautiful girl who sat on my right hand; for every day which brought her new health and strength, brought also to my love an instalment of her former rich beauty. In a very short time she would be to all appearances the Philippa of old.

"How long shall we stay in Paris, Basil?" asked my mother.

"It is now half-past nine; our train starts at 8.45 in the morning. Calculate the time."

"Oh, nonsense! It is years since I have been in Paris. I want to look at the shops. So does Philippa, I am sure."

"My dear mother, the man, much more the woman, who lingers in Paris is lost. If you are going elsewhere, the only way is to go straight through, or else you get no further. I have proved this, and mean to run no risk."

"But remember we are only weak women. This poor child is far from strong."

She smiled at Philippa, whose eyes thanked her for the affectionate appellation.

"Don't be merciless, Basil," she continued; "give us at least one day."

"Not one. I am just going to look after a courier, so that you may travel in all possible comfort."

My mother seemed almost annoyed, and again said I was merciless. What would she have said had she known that, unless I had received that letter, instead of going to our present comfortable quarters, we should have driven to the Orleans Railway, and taken the first train to the south? How little she knew—how little, I trusted, Philippa knew—from what we were flying!

I felt I must give my mother some reason for my haste; so, before going in quest of my courier, I took her aside.

"It is not well for Philippa to stay in Paris," I said. "Some one whom she ought not to meet was here a short time ago."

I blamed myself for the deception; but what could I do? Alas! it seemed to me that my life, which once was fearlessly open to the inspection of all, was now full of little else save deceptions. Should I ever again be my true self?

My mother raised no further objection. I found a courier—a bearded gentleman of commanding presence, who spoke every European language with impartial imperfection. I gave him instructions to see to everything the next morning; to collect our luggage, save the small quantity we carried with us, and to register it through to Burgos. I had no particular reason for choosing Burgos, but it seemed a convenient place at which to take our first thorough rest.

The next day's journey was a dull, dreary, wearisome affair. My companions had not shaken off the fatigue of the previous day, and now that I felt Philippa's safety was, comparatively speaking, assured, a reaction set in with me. No wonder! I shudder now as I think of the strain to which both body and mind had been subjected during the last fortnight. I was moody and listless. The air was full of fog and mist. The so-called express train pounded along after the well-known style of French railways. Orleans, Blois, Tours, Poictiers, Angoulême, Coutras, and other stations passed me as one in a dream. The dull day crept on until dark evening was upon us, and we were all thoroughly glad when our day's journey ended at Bordeaux.

My mother, who was rather great at guide-books, had beguiled part of the journey by a Murray, which somehow made its appearance from her travelling-bag. As she knew we were to sleep at Bordeaux she had been laying down the law as to what we were to look at. We were to see the curious high wooden fifteenth-century houses of the old town; the cathedral, with its fine towers; the very old churches of St. Croix and St. Seurin, and a variety of other interesting objects. It needed all the assurance I possessed, all the invalid's querulousness and insistance I could assume, to induce her to consent to resume our journey the first thing in the morning. Even Philippa pleaded for delay, and gave me to understand that she thought I was using my mother unfairly. But I was firm. If I could I would have hurried on by the midnight train. Anyway, now that we were within a few hours' journey of the frontier and of safety, I would leave no more than I could help to chance.

So, in the early morning, I got my party together and before it was light led them to the train. I believe that by now my mother looked upon me as rather out of my senses. She frankly owned she could not see the necessity for making such a toil out of what might be a pleasure. She little knew that nothing could have made that journey a pleasure to me; that even finding Philippa's eyes now and again fixed on my face with what I almost dared to think was tender interest—that even the blush which crossed her cheek when I caught those glances—was not sufficient to reward me for my anxiety.

A slow, a painfully slow train. Innumerable stoppages. A country which under the circumstances would have given me no interest even if we had been in summer instead of winter; and then, after nearly five hours' slow travelling, Bayonne at last. Bayonne, with its strong fortifications. Bayonne, with the welcome Pyrenees towering above it. In less than two hours we should be in Spain.

A curious dread seized me—a presentiment so strong that ever since then I have lost faith in presentiments. Something seemed to tell me that all my efforts had been in vain; that at the frontier there would be certain intelligence received which would lead to our arrest; that Philippa, with one foot, as it were, in the land of refuge, would be seized and carried back to face the horrors and the shame of a trial for murder. It was, as events showed, an absurd fancy, and only the increasing tension of my nerves can account for the hold it gained upon me.

I grew so pale, trembled so in every limb, that my companions were thoroughly alarmed. We had brandy with us, which was duly administered to me. After awhile I recovered, and although the fear was still with me, sat with the stoicism of an Indian at the stake, awaiting what might happen at the frontier. I had done all I could. If, at the last moment, disaster overtook us, I had at least striven by every means within my power to avert it.

We have passed Biarritz, the merry bright watering-place. We have passed Hendaye, the French frontier station. We leave the towering Pyrenees on our left. We are at Irun, where all baggage must be jealously scrutinized. We are in Spain! Nobody has troubled us. No suspicious-looking stranger has watched us. The stoppage has been long, for the custom-house officers are annoyingly particular in the discharge of their duty; but our noble-looking courier has saved us all personal trouble. He has done us yeoman's service. At last we are in another train, a train which runs on a line of another gauge. The very time of day has changed. We have lost or gained—I forget which—some twenty minutes. We now count by Madrid time. We are fairly on Spanish ground, and I have saved my love. Saved her from others—now to save her from herself. Never, never shall she know the secret of that dark night. We will speed away to the south—to the sun; the color; the brightness; the flowers. All shall be forgotten. The dark remembrance shall be swept from my mind. I will call it a dream. I will win Philippa's love—the love that I dare to believe is already almost mine. We will live forever in bright, sunny, glowing lands. Who cares for dull, dark, dismal England? Have we not youth, wealth, and oh, blessed word! love? Before my love and me lie years and years of sweetness and joy. Shake off black gloom and be merry, Basil North. You have conquered fate!

We have passed St. Sebastian. The sluggish train is wearily winding up the valley of the Urumea. We are in wild and glorious scenery. The railway is carried at a great elevation, from which we get now and again peeps of far-away valleys. Yes, I could now find time to admire the wonderful scenery which lasted until we passed Miranda.

My mood changed with the country. I laughed; I jested. Each of the many stations at which we stopped furnished materials for my new-born meriment. I laughed at the solemn-looking Spanish railway officials, and drew pictures of the doleful fate of imaginary nobly-born hidalgos whom poverty forced to descend to such employment. I grumbled not at the slowness of the train, although an ordinary traveller might well, when on a Spanish line, sigh for the comparatively lightning speed of the much-maligned French trains. Time was nothing to me now. Was there not a lifetime stretching before me—and Philippa? My gayety was contagious. My mother laughed until the tears came, and Philippa smiled as I had not seen her smile since we picked up under such sad circumstances that long-dropped thread of friendship.

Those who have travelled in Spain will scarcely credit me when I say we had the compartment to ourselves. We were troubled by no cloaked Spaniard who, as is the wont of his kind, insisted upon smoking like a furnace and keeping both windows shut. Our noble courier had been given his instructions. His arguments were venal, and had I troubled about money I should have found them costly. But they carried the point, and no one intruded on our privacy.

The hours went by. My mother slept, or pretended to sleep. I seated myself near Philippa, and whispered words of thinly-veiled love. She answered them not—I expected no answer—but her eyes were downcast and her cheek was blushing. She sighed. A sad smile played around her sweet mouth; a smile that spoke of a world of regret. That sigh, that smile, told me that she understood me, but told me also that, ah! it could never be. The past never forgives! But all the same she let her hand rest in mine; and although, considering what had happened, I scarcely dare to say so, for once, for many, many months, I was all but happy.

For me that journey ended only too soon. At night we reached Burgos, the capital of the old Castilian kingdom, and I laid my head on my pillow and enjoyed sleep such as I had not known since the night before that one, when Philippa, with the snow-flakes falling around her, stood outside the window of my cottage and gave me something to live for—something to hope for!

CHAPTER IX.

SAFE—AND LOVED.

NOW that we are safe in Spain, now that Philippa's arrest is a matter of impossibility, and her expulsion from a country so lax in its observance of international obligations highly improbable, when her guilt can at the utmost be only suspected, if indeed suspicion ever points to her, I may pass rapidly over the events of the next two months; the more so as my record of them would differ very little from the description of an ordinary tour in Spain. To me, after the feverish anxiety, the horrible dread as to what any hour might bring forth, which had characterized our flight from England, it seemed something very much like bathos my dropping at once into the position of the every-day tourist taking a couple of ladies on a round of travel; but for the time I was outwardly neither more nor less.

From Burgos we went to Valladolid; from Valladolid to Madrid—Madrid, the high-perched city, with its arid, uninteresting surroundings and abominable climate. Not long did we linger here. Bad and trying as the English winter may be, the cold of Madrid is a poor exchange for it. I had almost thrown aside the assumed character of an invalid; but I felt it would be the height of inconsistency, after forcing my companions to accompany me in the search of warmth, to make any stay in the Spanish capital. Right glad I was to leave it, and turn my face southward. Philippa was by now in apparently good health, both bodily and mental; but while at Madrid I trembled for her, as I should tremble for any one I loved who made that city a resting-place—a city swept from end to end by crafty, treacherous, icy winds blowing straight from the Guadarrama mountains; insidious blasts in which lurk the seeds of consumption and death.

So at our leisure we went southward, halting at such places and seeing such sights as we thought fit; lingering here and there just so long as it suited us; travelling by easy stages, and in such comfort as we could command. At Malaga we spent weeks, revelling in the balmy, delicious air; at Granada we were days and days before we could tear ourselves from the interesting, absorbing glories of the departed Moor. We were in a new world—a world which I had always longed to see. At last—it was just at the end of April, when the land was full of roses, when vegetation was breaking into that rich luxuriance unknown in the northern lands—we turned our steps to the city which I had in my own mind fixed upon as the end of our wanderings, the half Spanish, half Moorish, but wholly beautiful city of Seville; brilliant, romantic Seville, with its flower-bedecked houses, its groves of orange and olive trees, its luxuriant gardens, its crooked narrow streets, its Moorish walls, its numerous towers, all of which sink into insignificance under the shadow of the lofty Giralda. All I wanted seemed to be here.

Here was everything for the sake of seeking which I had professed to leave foggy England—sun, warmth, color, brightness. Here I thought, if in any place in the world, will the one I love forget what she knows of the cruel past. Here, it may be, our new life shall begin.

Glorious, wonderful Seville! The magic charm of the place fell on my companions as it fell upon me, as indeed it falls upon all who visit it. By common consent we arranged to stay our course for an indefinite time. Perhaps by now we all thought that we had endured enough of hotel life, and wanted some place which might bear the name of home; so, although such things are not very easy to find, I hired a furnished house. Such a house!

From the narrow street—the need of shade makes narrow streets indispensable to Seville—pass through a light open-work iron gate into a spacious white marble-lined courtyard, or, as the Spaniards call it, *patio;* a courtyard open to the sky, save for the gayly-colored awning which is sometimes spread over it; a space fragrant to the four corners with the perfume of orange and other sweet-smelling blossoms, bright with glowing oleanders, and musical with the murmur of fountains. Around the walls statues, some of the fair works of art, paintings and mirrors. Every sitting-room in the house opening on to this cool central fairyland—a fairyland which, for many months of the year, is almost the only part of the house used in their waking hours by the Sevillaños. Add to this a garden, not large but exquisite, full of the rarest and choicest blooms, and if you are not hopelessly bigoted, and enamored of English fogs, you must long for such a home in courtly, beautiful Seville!

With such surroundings—almost those of a Sybarite—who can blame me for being lulled into security, if not forgetfulness, and for telling myself that my troubles were nearly at an end? Who can wonder at the castles I built as hour after hour I lounged in the *patio*, with its fragrant, soothing atmosphere, and gazed at Philippa's beautiful face, and now and again meeting her dark eyes, and sometimes surprising in those thoughtful depths a look which thrilled my heart—a look which I told myself was one of love?

True, that often and often in my sleep I saw the white, dead face, with the snow-heap forming over it. True, that often and often Philippa's wild cry, "The wages of sin—on, on, on!" rang through my dreams, and I awoke trembling in every limb; but in the day-time, in the midst of the sweet shaded repose, I could almost banish every memory, every thought which strove to lead me back to grief and horror.

The days, each one sweeter than its forerunner, passed by. Each day was passed with Philippa. We wandered for hours through the marvellous gardens of the Alcazar; we drove under the shading trees of Las Delicias; we made excursions to Italica and other places, which the guide-book tells you every visitor to Seville should see; but I think we found in the ordinary sights, which were at our very door, as much pleasure as in any of the stock shows. We loved to watch the people. We delighted in the picturesque, ragged-looking, black-eyed Andalusian boy-rascals who played and romped at every street-corner. We noted the exquisitely graceful figures of the Sevillañas; I, moreover, noted that the most graceful of these figures could not be compared to Philippa's own. We strolled up the awning-roofed Calle de las Sierpes, and laughed at the curious windowless little shops. Everything was so strange, so bright, so teeming with old-world tradition, so full of intense interest, that no wonder I could for the time send painful memories to the background.

And Philippa? Although there were times when her face grew sad with sad remembrances; although at times her eyes sought mine with that troubled, inquiring look; although I trembled as to what might be the question which I seemed to see her lips about to form; I did not, could not believe she was entirely unhappy. The smile—a quiet, thoughtful one, yet a smile—was oftener seen on her face. It came now of its own accord. More and more certain I grew that, if nothing recalled the past, or I should say, if nothing filled the blank, so mercifully left, of that one night, the hour was not far distant when my love would call herself happy. Oh, to keep that fatal knowledge from her forever!

Such was my life. So, in calm, peace, all but happiness, the days passed by, until the hour came when for the third time I dared to tell Philippa that I loved her—to tell her so with the certainty of hearing her re-echo my words. Yes, certainty. Had I not for many days seen her eyes grow brighter, the grave, thoughtful look leave her face, her whole manner change when I drew near? Such signs as these told me that the crowning moment of my life was at hand.

Here for one moment I pause. I scorn to excuse myself for wishing to marry a woman who had been, or supposed herself to have been, the innocent victim of a scoundrelly man of the world. I have nothing in common with those who think such an excuse is needed. Mrs. Wilson's statement that the marriage was valid might be true or false. It gave me the impression that it was true, and I believed that Philippa could lay claim to bear the man's accursed name. But whether she was Lady Ferrand, or a trusting woman betrayed, for my own sake I cared little. She was Philippa!

As to my intention of marrying, my one wish to marry, a woman who, in her temporary and fully-accounted-for delirium, had killed the man who so cruelly wronged her, I have but this to say. My tale, although I give it to the world, is not written for the purpose of fiction. It is the story of myself—a story which seemed to me worth telling—of a man who loved one woman passionately, blindly, and without consideration. Such was my great love for Philippa that I feel no shame in telling the truth, and saying that had I seen her, in full possession of her senses, level that pistol and shoot her betrayer through his black heart, I should have held that only justice had been done. I should have regretted the act, but, nevertheless, I would have pleaded for her love as fervently and reverently as I now was about to plead for it.

Once more I say, if you condemn me, throw the book aside.

Philippa, with her eyes half closed, was, as was usual at that hour, sitting in the *patio*. In her hand she held a sprig of orange blossom, and ever and anon inhaled its delicious perfume; an action, by the bye, scarcely needful, as the whole air was redolent of the fragrance thrown from the great tree in the centre of the marble space. She was, or fancied she was, alone, as some little time before I had left the court to obtain a fresh supply of cigarettes; and my mother, who could never quite adapt herself to the semi-open-air life, was taking a siesta in the drawing-room. As I saw Philippa in all her glowing beauty, the white marble against which she leaned making as it were a suitable foil to the warm color of her cheek—the long, curved, black, downcast lashes—the bosom rising and falling gently—like an inspiration the thought came to me that in a minute my fate would be decided. Heavens! how could I have waited so long to hear the words which I knew she would say?

I crept noiselessly to her side. I passed my arm round her waist and drew her to me. I whispered words of passionate love in her ear—words, the confidence of which startled me; but then this time I knew that my love of years was to be rewarded.

She did not shrink away; she did not struggle to free herself, but she trembled like a leaf in my embrace. She sighed deeply, even hopelessly, and I saw the tears welling in her dark eyes. Closer and firmer I held her, and kissed her cheek again and again. Had that moment been my last I should have said I had not lived in vain.

"Philippa," I whispered, "my queen, my love, tell me you love me at last."

She was silent. The tears broke from her eyes and ran down her cheeks. I kissed the signs of sorrow away.

"Dearest," I said, "it is answer enough that you suffer these kisses, but I have waited so long—been so unhappy; look at me and satisfy me; let me hear you say, 'I love you!'"

She turned her tearful eyes to mine, but not for long. She cast her looks upon the ground and was still silent. Yet she lay unresisting in my arms. That, after all, was the true answer.

But I must have it from her lips. "Tell me, dearest—tell me once," I prayed.

Her lips quivered; her bosom rose and fell. The blush spread from her cheek and stole down her white neck.

"Yes," she murmured, "now that it is too late, I love you."

I laughed a wild laugh. I clasped Philippa to my breast.

"Too late!" I cried. "We may have fifty years of happiness."

"It is too late," she answered. "For your sake I have told you that I love you, Basil. My love, I will kiss you once—then loose me, and let us say farewell."

"When death closes the eyes of one of us we will say farewell—not until then," I said, as my lips met hers in a long and rapturous kiss.

Then with a sigh she gently but firmly freed herself from my arms. She rose, we stood on the marble floor, face to face, gazing in each other's eyes.

"Basil," she said softly, "all this must be forgotten. Say farewell; to-morrow we must part."

"Dearest, our lives henceforth are one."

"It cannot be. Spare me, Basil! You have been kind to me. It cannot be."

"Why? Tell me why."

"Why! need you ask? You bear an honored and respected name; and I, you know what I am—a shamed woman."

"A wronged woman, it may be, not a shamed one."

"Ah! Basil, in this world, when a woman is concerned, wronged and shamed mean the same thing. You have been as a brother to me. I came to you in my trouble; you saved my life—my reason. Be kinder still, and spare me the pain of paining you."

By look, by word, by gesture, she seemed to beseech me. Oh, how I longed to tell her that I firmly believed she was the dead man's wife! I had much difficulty in checking the words which were forming on my lips. But I dared not speak. Telling her that the marriage was a valid one meant that I must tell her of her husband's death, and, it might be, how he died.

"Philippa," I said, "the whole happiness of my life, my every desire, is centred upon making you my wife. Think, dearest, how when I had no right to demand this gift my life was made desolate; think what it will be when I know you love me and yet refuse to be mine! Have I been true to you, Philippa?"

"Heaven knows you have."

"Then why, now that you love me, refuse me my reward?"

"Oh, spare me!—I cannot, I will not give it. Basil, dear Basil, why with your talents should you marry the cast-off—mistress—of Sir Mervyn Ferrand? Why should you blush to show your wife to the world?"

"Blush! The world! What is my world save you? You are all to me, sweetest. You love me—what more do I want? Before this time next week we will be married."

"Never, never! I will not wrong the man I love. Basil, farewell forever!"

She clasped her hands and fled wildly across the court. I caught her at the door, which she had reached and half opened. "Promise me one thing," I said; "promise you will wait here until my return. I shall not be five minutes. It is not much to ask, Philippa."

Philippa bent her head as in assent. I passed through the door, and in a few minutes returned to the *patio*, accompanied by my mother, who glanced from Philippa to me in a surprised way.

"What is the matter?" she asked, with her cheerful smile. "Have you two young people been quarrelling?"

Philippa made no answer. She stood with her fingers interlaced; her eyes cast on the ground.

"Mother," I said, "I have to-day asked Philippa to be my wife. I have told her that all my happiness depends upon her consent to this. I have loved her for years; and at last she loves me. Yes, she loves me."

My mother gave a little cry of pleasure, and stepped forward. I checked her.

"I love her, and she loves me," I continued. "But she refuses to marry me. And why? Because she fears to bring shame on an honorable name. You know her story; you are my mother. You, of all people in the world, should be the most jealous as to the honor of my name. You should know whom you would choose for my wife. Tell her—"

I said no more. My mother advanced with outstretched arms, and in a moment my poor girl was weeping in her embrace, while words which I could not hear, but whose purport I could well guess, were being whispered to her. I had indeed been right in trusting to my mother's noble nature.

"Leave us for a little while, Basil," she said, as Philippa still sobbed upon her shoulder. "Come back in a quarter of an hour's time."

I turned away, went past the screen which is sometimes put up to insure privacy, out of the iron gate, into the narrow street. I watched the lounging, dignified-looking men and the dark-eyed women who went by; I looked at the merry urchins at play; and after what seemed an interminable quarter of an hour, returned to learn how my gentle counsel had succeeded with my suit.

My mother and Philippa were sitting with their arms around each other. Philippa, as I entered the *patio*, raised her eyes to mine with a look of shy happiness. My mother rose and took the girl by the hand.

"Basil," she said, "I have at last been able to persuade her that you and I, at least, rise above the conventionalities of what is called the world. I have told her that, knowing all I know, I see nothing to prevent her from being your wife. I have told her that simply for her own sweet sake I would rather see you marry her than any woman in the world. And, Basil, I fancy I have made her believe me."

With her soft eyes full of maternal love, my mother kissed me and left the court. I opened my arms to close them round the fairest woman in the world; and all the earth seemed bright and glorious to me. My great love had conquered!

And yet, even in that moment of bliss, my thoughts involuntarily flew away to a snow-heaped road in England—to a white drift, under which for days and days a ghastly object had once been lying. A dream! a dream! It must have been a fearful dream. Forget it, Basil North, and be happy in the happiness you have at last won!

CHAPTER X.

THE SWORD FALLS.

ONCE conquered—once convinced that the obstacles which her solicitude for my welfare raised against my wish were not insuperable—Philippa offered no further resistance; while as for me, every day that might be counted before I called her my wife seemed a day spoiled, if not entirely wasted. With my mother's arguments to back my own fervent persuasion, I had no difficulty in winning Philippa's consent to our marriage taking place as soon as the needful formalities could be complied with. And yet, although the day was fixed it was at my instance changed, and the ceremony postponed for a while.

My reason for deferring my crowning happiness was this. Knowing all that I knew, the question arose, under what name was Philippa to be married? Under her own maiden name; under the false name which for some time Sir Mervyn Ferrand, for reasons best known to himself, had made her assume; or under that name which, supposing Mrs. Wilson had spoken the truth, she was legally entitled to bear? So anxious, so resolved was I that there should be no shadow of doubt as to the validity of her second and happier marriage, that after due consideration I determined to sacrifice my own inclinations, and postpone our wedding long enough to give me time to pay a flying visit to England, where I could do my best to obtain such evidence as would show that Philippa was the dead man's widow.

I made the excuse that I found many matters of business connected with my property must be attended to before I could be married. I travelled to England—to Liverpool—as fast as I could. I stayed there for a week, and during that time made full researches into the life and death of a woman who, as Mrs. Wilson said, had died on a certain date, and been buried under the name of Lucy Ferrand.

The information I acquired as to her antecedents is of no consequence to my story. Whatever her faults may have been, her history was a sad one; indeed it seemed to me that the history of any woman who had been cursed by Sir Mervyn Ferrand's love was a sad one. However, the result of my investigations was, in short, this: Ferrand had married the woman many years ago. They had parted by mutual consent. With his cynical carelessness, he had troubled no more about her; and, stranger still, she had not troubled him. She died on the date given by my informant. The question of identity could be easily settled; so that if ever Philippa chose to claim the rights appertaining to Sir Mervyn Ferrand's widow, she would have no difficulty in making that claim good. But I trusted that years might pass before she learned that the man was dead.

I made my presence in England known to no one; in fact, I felt that in returning to my native country I ran a certain amount of risk. For all I knew to the contrary, there might be a warrant out against me. If suspicion as to the author of that night's work had in any way been directed to Philippa, I, the partner of her flight, could not hope to escape free. However, I comforted myself by thinking that if danger menaced us I should have heard something about it, as after our first hurried start I had made no attempt to conceal our whereabouts. It would have been useless. My mother had friends in England, with whom she exchanged letters. I had an agent and lawyers, with whom, if only for financial reasons, I was bound to correspond. I had been obliged to write to my stolid William, and instruct him to get rid of the cottage as best he could, and to look out for a fresh place for himself. But all the same I did not care to let it be known that I was now in England.

While engaged upon raking up evidence on Philippa's behalf, I did not neglect to make such inquiries as I could respecting the event which had happened that night near Roding. I found that, so far as the general public knew, the crime was still veiled in mystery. No one had been arrested; no one had been accused; no reason for the deed had been discovered, and as yet suspicion pointed to no one. Indeed, in spite of the hundred pounds reward offered by Government, it seemed that Sir Mervyn Ferrand's murder was relegated to swell the list of undiscovered crimes. By this I knew that Mrs. Wilson had kept her promise of silence; and now that months had gone by, now that public attention had been turned from the thrilling affair, now that Philippa seemed as far or farther than ever from giving any token which suggested the awakening of recollection of what her wrong, her frenzy, had prompted her hand to do unknowingly, I dared to hope that any chance which remained of a revelation of the truth was reduced to a minimum. These results of my investigations and inquiries gave me immense relief, and my heart was all but gay as, armed with the proofs of the first Lady Ferrand's death, I hurried back to Seville, Philippa, and the happiness which I vowed should be mine.

We were married. Philippa and I were married! Married; and a few months ago I sat lonely, miserable, and heart-broken, deeming that the one I loved was lost to me forever! What matters the things which have filled those months, and made them the most painful of my life? To-day we are man and wife, joined together till death us do part!

I said no word as to the result of my inquiries in Liverpool. I had no difficulty in persuading Philippa, who in some things was as simple and trusting as a child, that it was necessary, or at least advisable, she should be married under the name which her first certificate of marriage affected to bestow upon her. She signed her name for the last, it may, for aught I know, have also been the first time, as Philippa Ferrand; and I noticed that she shuddered as she formed the letters.

Although my bride was by birth half a Spaniard, and although I had by now in many ways conformed to the Spanish mode of life, we were still English enough to look upon going away somewhere for a honeymoon as indispensable. It would be but a short trip; and as my mother in our absence would be left at Seville alone, or with servants only, we did not care to go very far away. It so happened that, although so close to Cadiz, we had not yet paid that town a visit, and thought the present a capital opportunity for so doing.

To Cadiz we went, and stayed several days at the Hotel de Paris. We liked the white-walled town, rising and shining above the dark-blue sea, like, as I have somewhere seen it described, a white pearl in a crown of sapphires;

or, as the Gaditanos call it, *tazita de plata*, a silver cup. We liked the rows of tall terrace-topped houses. We liked the movement and bustle on the quays and in the port. We liked the walks on the broad granite ramparts, and the lovely views of the busy bay and country beyond it; but all the same we agreed that Cadiz bore no comparison to our beautiful Seville, and the sooner we returned to that gay city the better.

Now that I had gained my desire, was I happy? After all that had passed, could I have been happy during those early days of our wedded life? As I look back upon them, I sit and muse, trying in vain to answer the question to my own satisfaction. Philippa loved me—she was my wife; come good, come evil, she was mine forever. In so much I was happy, thrice happy. Could I have lived but for the present, my bliss would have known no alloy.

But there was the past! I could not altogether forget the path which had led to such happiness as now was mine. I could be thankful that I alone knew all the horrors and dangers with which that path was studded. I alone knew the secret of that one night. Although I could keep it forever, would it be always a secret?

Yes, and there was the future. Behind the happiness which was mine at present lurked a dread as to what the future had in store for me—for us. It was a dread which day by day grew stronger. The greater my happiness, the more dreadful the thought of its being wrecked. The feeling that my house of joy was built upon sand was always obtruding on my most blissful hours, and not, I knew, without good reasons.

Philippa's very avoidance of speaking of her past life lent some justification to my gloomy forebodings. Not once did Sir Mervyn Ferrand's name pass between my wife and me. Not once did she ask me for any further particulars concerning the events of that night upon which, in the height of her short-lived mania, she reached my cottage. True that upon becoming my wife, and beginning a new and happier stage of life, it might be but natural for her to wish to consign to oblivion the wrong, the shame, the suffering wrought by a villain's craft; yet I was so mixed up in the catastrophe that silence on the subject seemed strange. Her reticence alarmed me. I fancied it must be caused by some vague uneasiness connected with that night—some doubt which she dared not seek to set at rest. It is, I know, not unusual for women, after their recovery from that mysterious disease which had for awhile driven my poor girl distraught, to be able to recall and accurately describe the delusions which had afflicted them during those wandering hours. I myself had in one or two cases noticed this peculiarity, and the authorities which I had studied during Philippa's illness mention it as an indisputable fact. My great dread was that at some moment, perhaps when our happiness was as perfect as it could be, some simple chance, some allusion to certain events, even the bare mention of a name, might supply the missing link, and the fearful truth would be revealed to my wife.

Our return journey to Seville was made by water. Although the Guadalquiver is not a very interesting river, we thought travelling by steamer would be a pleasant change from the journeys in the hot, stuffy, slow trains, full from end to end with the odor of garlic and tobacco; so early one morning we left Cadiz, and were soon steaming up the sluggish, dull, turbid river, with the great flat stretches of swampy land on either hand.

There were not many passengers on board the steamer. The boat itself was a wretched affair, and before an hour was over we wished we had chosen the train as a mode of transit. Mile after mile of the level deserted land through which the river flows passed by, and presented no objects of interest greater than herds of cattle or flights of aquatic birds. Save that Philippa was by my side, it was the dullest journey I ever made.

Of course there were English tourists on board; no spot is complete without them. Two of them, young men, and apparently gentlemen, had seated themselves near us; and after the usual admiring glances at my beautiful Philippa, commenced a desultory talk with each other.

From the unrestrained way in which they spoke, and from the strength of some of their unfavorable comments on the scenery, or lack of scenery, it was clear that they took us for natives, before whom they could speak without being understood. Philippa, of course, looked a thorough Spaniard, and my own face had become so tanned by the sun that I might have been of any nationality.

The young fellows chatted on, quite oblivious to the fact that two of their neighbors understood every word they spoke. For some time I listened with great amusement; then the lulling motion of the steamer, the sluggish muddy flow of the stream, the monotonous banks past which we stole, exercised a soporific effect upon me, and I began to doze and dream.

Through my dreams I heard a name, a hated name, spoken clearly and distinctly. I started and opened my eyes. Philippa's head was stretched forward as if she was intent upon catching some expected words spoken by another.

"Sir Mervyn Ferrand," I heard one of our fellow-voyagers repeat. "Yes, I remember him; tall, good-looking man. Where is he now? He was a bad lot."

"Surely you read or heard about it?" said his companion in a tone of surprise.

I touched my wife's arm. "Come away, Philippa," I said.

She made a motion of dissent. Again I urged her. She shook her head pettishly.

"Ah! I forgot where you have been for months," said the second tourist, laughing; "out of the pale of civilization and newspapers. Well, Ferrand was murdered—shot dead!"

"Philippa, dearest, come, I implore you," I whispered.

It was too late! The look on her face told me that nothing would now move her—nothing! She would hear the dreadful truth, told perhaps with distorted details. I groaned inwardly. The moment I had so long dreaded had come. If I dragged her away by force—if I interrupted the speakers—what good could it do? She had heard enough. She would force me to tell her the rest. I could only pray that she would not in any way associate herself with the man's death.

"Murdered! Poor fellow! Who murdered him?" I heard the first speaker say.

"No one knows. He was shot dead on a country roadside, just as that fearful snow-storm of last winter began. It seems almost incredible, but the snow drifted over him, and until it melted the crime was not discovered. In the interval the murderer had, of course, got clean away."

"Poor devil! I never heard any good of him; but what an end!"

I was not looking at the speakers. I was noting every change in my wife's face. I saw the color fly from her cheek. I saw her lips and throat working convulsively, as though she was trying to articulate. I saw her dark brows contract as in anguish. I knew that she was clasping her hands together, as was her way when agitated. Suddenly she turned her eyes to mine, and in her eyes was a look of horror which told me that the very worst had come to pass—that the dread which had haunted me was realized! Then with a low moan she sank, white and senseless, on my shoulder.

Though in a whirl of despair, I believe that I assumed a kind of mechanical calm. I seem to remember that the two English tourists offered their assistance; that, as we bore Philippa to an extemporized couch in the shadiest and coolest place we could find, I smiled, and attributed my wife's fainting-fit to the heat of the sun, the smell of engines, or something of that kind. Little did those young men guesss what their chance words had wrought. Little could they think that in speaking of Sir Mervyn Ferrand's death they had, perhaps, wrecked the happiness of two lives. My heart was full of grief and fear, but I believe I bore myself bravely.

In spite of such restoratives as we could administer, Philippa's swoon lasted for a considerable time. I troubled little about that fact. Indeed, to me it seemed well that syncope should have supervened, and, for a time, banished the dreadful memories which had so suddenly invaded her brain. Could such a thing have been possible, I would almost have wished that her insensibility would continue until we reached Seville. But it was not to be so. By and by she sighed deeply, and her eyes opened. Consciousness and all its dreaded sequence was hers once more.

I spoke to her, but she made no reply. She turned her eyes from mine; she shunned my gaze; she even seemed to shrink from the touch of my hand. During the remainder of that dreary journey not one word passed her lips. She lay with her face turned to the side of the vessel, heedless of curious glances from fellow-passengers, heedless of my whispered words of love; heedless of all save her own thoughts—thoughts which led her, I trembled to picture whither.

Through all those long sultry hours while the wretched steamboat ploughed its way up the broad muddy stream I sat beside her, trying to find some way out of our sorrow. Alas! every road was stopped by the impassable obstacle of Philippa's knowledge of what she had done. For she knew it, I was certain. That look in her eyes had told me so much. The duration of her insanity had been so short that I could gather no comfort from the fact that by some merciful arrangement maniacs who recover their erring senses are troubled little by the deeds they have done in their moments of madness. I felt that in my wife's case my only hope was to endeavor by argument to bring her to my own way of thinking; that is, to consider herself unaccountable by any law, human or divine, for her actions at the time. But I doubted if her sensitive, impulsive nature could ever be induced to take this view of her act. I doubted, had she not been the woman I loved with a passionate love, if I could have quite absolved her from the crime, with the remembrance of her words, "Basil, did you ever hate a man?" still with me.

Yet, strange anomaly, I would, in fair fight of course, have shot that man through the heart and have gloried in the deed. But then Philippa was a woman, and had she not been the woman I loved I might have shrunk from the one who, even in her madness, was urged to take such fearful vengeance.

I smiled bitterly as I thought how a chance breath of wind had tumbled my house of cards to the ground. I smiled almost triumphantly as I told myself that, come what might—misery—shame—death—I had won and held for a week the one desire of my life. Nothing could deprive me of that memory.

Home at last! Still silent, or answering my questions by monosyllables, Philippa was brought by me to our once happy home in Seville. My mother, with arch smiles of welcome on her comely face, was at the gate of the *patio* ready to receive us. As she saw her a kind of shiver ran through my poor love's frame. She let my mother embrace and caress her without any display of reciprocal affection.

"Philippa is ill," I said, in explanation. "I will take her to her room."

I led her to the apartment which my mother had in our absence fitted up for us. It was gay and beautiful with flowers, and there were many other careful little evidences of the hearty welcome which was waiting us. Philippa noticed nothing. I closed the door and turned toward my wife.

She looked at me with those wondrous dark eyes, which seemed to search my very soul. "Basil," she said, in a low, solemn voice, "tell me—tell me the truth. What had I done that night?"

CHAPTER XI.

SPECIAL PLEADING.

IT was over! She knew! The hope which may have buoyed my spirits, that Philippa's agitation at learning of Sir Mervyn Ferrand's death was but due to the fact that once she loved the man entirely vanished. I could see no loophole of escape, no possibility of persuading her that she was fancying horrors which had never taken place. Moreover, although I would have given my life to have saved her from the knowledge of this thing, I could not meet the eyes of her I loved, and lie to her.

I did indeed, if but for the sake of gaining time, attempt to stammer out some evasive answer; but she interrupted me before I had spoken five words.

"Why do I ask?" she echoed. "I knew it all—all—all! In dreams it has come to me—the whitened road—the dull dead face—the whirling snow! In dreams I have stood over him, and said to myself, 'He is dead!' But, Basil, my love, my husband, I thought it was but a dream. I drove it away. I said, 'It must be a dream. I hated him, and so I dreamed that I killed him.' Basil, dearest Basil, tell me, if you can, that I dreamed it!"

Her voice sank into accents of piteous entreaty. She looked at me yearningly.

"Dearest, it must have been a dream," I said.

She threw out her arms wildly. "No, no! It was no dream. Even now I can see myself standing in the night over that motionless form. I can feel the cold air on my cheek. I can see myself flying through the snow. Basil, I hated that man, and I killed him!"

The tears were streaming down my cheeks. I seized her hands, and strove to draw her to me. She tore herself from my grasp, and throwing herself wildly on the bed, broke into a paroxysm of sobs. As I approached her she turned her head from me.

"I killed him! killed him!" she whispered in awe-struck tones. "Oh, that fearful night! It has haunted me ever since. I knew not why. Now I know! He wronged me, and I killed him! killed him!"

I placed my arm around her neck, and my cheek against hers. As she felt my touch she started up wildly.

"No, no!" she cried. "Touch me not! Shun me! Shrink from me! Basil, do you hear? Do you understand? I have murdered a man!"

Once more she threw herself on the bed, her whole frame quivering with anguish.

"A shamed—a ruined woman!" she muttered. "A villain's forsaken toy, and now a murderess! You have chosen your wife well, Basil!"

"Sweetest, I love you," I whispered.

"Love me! How can you love me? Such love is not holy. If you love me, aid me to die, Basil! Give me something that will kill me! Why did you save my life?"

"Because I loved you then, as I love you now."

She was silent, and I hoped was growing calmer. I was but waiting for the first shock of her newly-born knowledge to pass away, in order to reason with her, and show her that by every moral law she was guiltless of the fearful crime. Suddenly she turned to me.

"How did I kill him?" she said, with a shudder.

"Dearest, rest. We will talk again presently."

"How did I kill him?" she repeated with vehemence.

"He was found shot through the heart," I answered reluctantly.

"Shot through his heart—his wicked heart! Shot by me! How could I have shot him? With what? Basil, tell me all, or I shall go mad! I will not have the smallest thing concealed. I will know all!"

"He was shot with a pistol."

"A pistol! a pistol! How did I come by it? Where is it?"

"I threw it away."

"You? Then you knew!"

I bowed my head. I felt that concealment was useless. She must know all.

I told her everything. I told her how she had promised to come for me; how, as she did not keep that promise, I went in search of her. I told her how she had swept past me in the snow-storm; how I had overtaken her. I repeated her wild words, and told her how the fatal weapon had fallen at my feet, and how I had, on the impulse of the moment, hurled it away into the night; how she had broken away from me, and fled down the lonely road; how, excited and terrified by her words, I had gone on to learn their meaning; how I had found the body of Sir Mervyn Ferrand; how, without thought of concealing the deed, I had laid the dead man by the roadside; how I had rushed home, and found her, Philippa, waiting for me, and in the full height of temporary insanity. I told her all this, and I swore that from the moment I discovered that her senses had gone astray I held her, although she had done so dreadful a deed, as innocent of crime as when she slept, a babe, on her mother's breast.

She listened to me with fixed dilated eyes. She interrupted me neither by word nor gesture; but when I had finished speaking she covered her face with her hands, and great tears trickled through her fingers. "No hope! No hope!" she cried. "Oh, Basil, I dared to hope that something you would tell me would show me it was not my hand which did this thing! My love, my own love, we have been so happy while I could persuade myself all this was a dream! We shall be happy no more, Basil!"

Although she still shrank from me, by force I drew her to me, and laid that poor head on my shoulder. I stroked the smooth black silky hair, I kissed the white forehead, and used every endearing and soothing expression that love such as mine could suggest. In vain! The moment I loosened my hold my wife fled from my side.

"Basil," she cried, "you knew it! You knew the blood of a man was on my hands! Again I say such love is not holy!"

"Dearest, again I tell you that in my eyes—if the truth were known, in the eyes of all—you are innocent as a babe."

She shook her head hopelessly, I saw that nothing at present could move her. Perhaps it was more than I had a right to expect. So for the time I gave up arguing. I begged her for my sake to retire to rest. I gave her a soothing draught. I sat by her for hours, and held her hand, until at last her eyelids fell, and, worn out by grief, she slept.

Oh, how right I had been in choosing flight! Although a cursed chance had revealed what I fondly hoped would be forever buried in oblivion, how right I had been! Had the hands of Justice grasped my sweet wife, although she might no doubt have been found guiltless, the trial, the exposure, would have killed her. Thank heaven, she was safe, and amenable only to the tribunal of her own sensitive conscience!

When I heard her breathing grow regular, and knew that she was in a deep sleep, I pressed my lips gently to her fair cheek, and left her. I went in search of my mother, and made the best tale I could think of to account for Philippa's indisposition. I forced myself to wear a smiling face, and to listen with a show of interest to the account my mother gave me of certain difficulties which had during my absence arisen with some of the native servants. But there was nothing which could really interest me when I thought of my poor love lying there sleeping, to awake, alas! to sorrow and remorse. No wonder that, as soon as I had spent with my mother the smallest portion of time which filial duty and gratitude exacted, I flew back to Philippa's bedside.

I watched beside her until she awoke—until her splendid dark eyes unveiled themselves. I leaned over and kissed her passionately. Between sleeping and waking, while consciousness was yet in abeyance, she returned my caresses. Then came back memory and its terrors.

"Leave me," she said; "I am a murderess!"

"Once more I denied it; once more I told her she was innocent. My only hope was, that by continued argument I might in time ease her mind. She listened almost apathetically. I grew eloquent and passionate. Was I not pleading for my own sake as well as hers?

If I could but persuade her she was unaccountable for what she had done, some remnant of the happiness which a few days ago I had promised myself might even now be left.

"Basil," she whispered, "I have been dreaming horrible things. Will they try me—and hang me?"

"We are in Spain, dearest. Even if you were guilty, the English law could not reach you."

She started. "And it was for this you hurried to Spain? To save me from a felon's death?"

"To save you from what, in your state at the time, you could not bear. I say again you are innocent, but I dare not risk the trial."

She was silent for some minutes; then she spoke.

"I am proud, passionate, wicked," she said; "but I could never have meant to do this. I was mad! I must have been mad! Basil, you could tell them I was mad. They would believe you, and forgive me."

She looked at me imploringly.

"I could stand up," I said, "and state on oath that you were at the time in a raging delirium. I could pledge my professional reputation that your actions were the result of madness. Fear nothing on that score, my wife."

I spoke boldly; but as I spoke a thought shot through me—a thought which blanched my cheek and brought the beads of perspiration to my brow. I knew enough of law to be aware that a husband could not in a criminal case give evidence for or against his wife. My marriage with Philippa had deprived her of the benefit of my testimony as to her insanity. I trembled like a leaf as I pictured what might happen in the event of her being tried for the murder of Sir Mervyn Ferrand. The very nurses had but seen her sane. No one but myself and perhaps my servant had seen her in her madness.

My dismay was such that I was bound to leave the room, in order to recover my presence of mind. Again and again I thanked Heaven that we were on foreign soil. The thought that my unreasoning love might have destroyed her I loved was almost more than I could bear.

I fancy I have lingered long enough over that terrible time, when my wife first learned that the dream which had haunted her was reality—that her hand had unknowingly avenged her supposed and premeditated wrong. Let me but say that the mental anguish into which the knowledge plunged her was not unattended by physical evil. In fact, for many days my poor girl was ill, very ill. My mother and I nursed her with every care, and by and by youth and a splendid constitution reasserted themselves, and, a shadow of her former self, she was able to leave her bed. My mother was tenderness itself to her daughter. She knew nothing of the true cause of her illness; indeed, she blamed me roundly for not having taken proper care of my beautiful bride, and vowed laughingly that for the future nothing should induce her to trust Philippa out of her sight.

Now that Philippa knew all she had done, I thought it better to tell her that, although he had no intention of so doing, Sir Mervyn Ferrand, in causing a mock marriage to be celebrated, had by a strange chance really made her his wife. This gave her little comfort. "It makes my crime the greater," she said bitterly. "I have killed my husband instead of my seducer! I am not fit to live!"

Weeks went by. Philippa gradually grew stronger, and, what was even more a cause of joy to me, calmer and more reasonable on a certain subject. With all the power I could bring to bear, I had never ceased to impress upon her that morally she was innocent, and I believed my words were bearing fruit. Her fits of mental anguish and self-reproach grew of less frequent occurrence. She did not, whenever we were alone, continually harp upon her crime. Calm seemed to settle upon us once more, and I ventured to hope that the great physician, Time, would one day bring to my wife's heart something that might be called sorrowful happiness; but I knew I must wait years and years for this.

She was changed, greatly changed. Her lips seldom smiled: her eyes never brightened, unless when she saw me drawing near. She seemed older and graver. But I knew, in spite of all, she loved me with a deathless love.

Although at last we had ceased to discuss the sorrow of our life, I suspected it was seldom absent from her mind. Sometimes as I lay beside her I heard her moaning and talking in her troubled dreams, and too well I knew the cause. As my arm stole round her, and assured her of the safety and certainty of my great love, in my heart I cursed the dead man whose evil deed had brought such lasting woe on the fair head pillowed on my bosom. Ah me! what life might have been for us two, now that love reigned between us!

Once—it was shortly after Philippa began to creep, a weak invalid, about the fragrant *patio*—she said to me, with evident meaning in her voice,

"Basil, do you see the London papers?"

"Sometimes—not always. I have almost forgotten England."

"Promise me you will see them every day."

"I will, if you wish; but why?"

Her voice sank. "Can you not guess? Basil, listen. I have consented to be guided by you. I am praying that the day may come when I shall think as you think. But what if an innocent person were accused of the crime I have committed? Then there is but one course; you could urge nothing against it. Promise me you will see the paper every day as soon as it reaches here. I shall have no peace unless you do."

I promised fearlessly. Justice does sometimes make mistakes, but not such a mistake as the one hinted at by Philippa. No; Sir Mervyn Ferrand's death was a mystery never to be solved. So, to set my poor wife at ease on the matter, I wrote and ordered that *The Times* should be posted to me every day.

CHAPTER XII.

TEMPTED TO DISHONOR.

I HATE looking back and re-reading words which I have written while the impulse was upon me; but I fancy I have somewhere called this tale a confession; if not, I should have done so. It claims no more to be ranked as a work of art than as a work of imagination. How could it? It holds only two characters—a man and a woman. It treats but of their love and of a few months of their lives. Nevertheless, in telling it I have endeavored to conceal nothing. I have tried to describe my thoughts, my hopes, my fears, my sorrows, and my joys, as they really were. I have, I believe, suppressed nothing which could lead any one to condemn my actions more strongly than, it may be, they now condemn them. My wish has been to show myself as I was then—no doubt am now—a weak, selfish man; yet, for the love which he bore a woman, one willing to risk fortune, life, even honor. If I have failed in my attempt to represent myself as such a one, believe it is not from intention, but from sheer inability.

But whether I have so far succeeded or failed in my purpose I know not; but I know that in this chapter I must, perforce, fail. The language rich and powerful enough to serve my needs has yet to be invented. The writer who could in any fitting way reproduce my thoughts has yet to be born.

And yet the chapter will be a short one. It will be but the record of a few hours; but such hours! Hours during which I struggled against a temptation to commit, not only crime, but base, cowardly crime; a temptation stronger, I dare to think, than poor human nature has as yet been subjected to. My words sound bold; but listen.

Oh, that one morning! How well I can remember it! Our breakfast was just over. The quaint-shaped little table, with its snowy cloth throwing into relief the deep colors of the luscious fruit upon it, still stood in the awning-roofed *patio.* I was alone, my mother and Philippa having retired in-doors to see about some domestic economy. I lounged lazily and at my ease. I rolled and lighted a cigarette, blaming myself as I did so for my barbarity in profaning the blossom-scented air with tobacco-smoke. Then I took from my pocket the London *Times*, which had arrived by the last post, and listlessly set to work to skim its lengthy columns.

I had no fear as to what the paper might contain. It was not from newspaper reports that I apprehended danger. I had, however, noticed that Philippa, when she saw me with a newspaper in my hand, eyed me anxiously and inquiringly; so that generally I contrived to glance through it when she was absent. I never permitted her to touch it until I had read it; but my only reason for this prohibition was, that I feared lest some chance allusion to the mysterious and undiscovered crime might distress her. Her own far-fetched fancy that another might be accused of it gave me not a moment's uneasiness.

So I turned and doubled back the broad sheets. I ran down the topics of the day. I skimmed the leading articles. I glanced at the foreign news; paid scant attention to law reports, and disregarded altogether the money-market intelligence. At last I turned my attention to the provincial news column. A name caught my eye; a cold shiver of dread ran through me. My cigarette fell on the marble pavement, and lay there unheeded, as, with agitation which no words can describe, I read a short paragraph placed under the heading of the principal town of the county in which Roding was situated. Read!

"William Evans, the man accused of the murder of Sir Mervyn Ferrand, Bart., in January last, will be tried at these Assizes, which open on the twentieth. The case, which excites considerable interest, will be taken on the first day. It is reported that although fresh evidence against the prisoner will be forthcoming, it will be of a purely circumstantial nature."

Every word of that accursed paragraph seemed like a blow falling upon my head. For some minutes I sat as one stunned. I felt my teeth chattering. I knew that my cheek was blanched. Philippa's fanciful dread had come to pass! Another—an innocent man—was bearing the blame of her own mad act! Dazed, stupid, scarcely able to comprehend what must be the full effect of what I had just read, I sat motionless, with my eyes fixed upon that fatal sheet.

The sound of my mother's pleasant voice calling to Philippa at last awoke me from my stupor. They were coming. I could not face them. I doubled up the newspaper, thrust it into my pocket, and rushed out into the street. As yet I had not dared to imagine what this intelligence might mean to us. I must have long hours of solitude, in order to decide what course should be adopted to face this, the last, the worst peril.

I passed swiftly through the iron gate. I went up the narrow street at a pace which must have made all who saw me think me mad. Whither did I go? I scarcely remember. I think it must have been to one of the public gardens; but in that hour all sense of locality left me. I went instinctively in search of solitude. I found, I know not how or where, some shady deserted spot. There, in the anguish of my heart, amid the wreck of my sand-founded happiness, I threw myself on the ground, and dug my finger-nails into the dry soil.

At first I thought I was going or had gone mad. The thoughts which rushed through my mind were disjointed, and wanted coherence. An innocent man accused of the crime! To be tried on the twentieth! The twentieth! and now it is the sixteenth! Fresh evidence forthcoming! The fools—the utter fools! This the boasted detective skill! To arrest on suspicion, to bring to trial a man who must be ignorant of everything connected with the murder! What is to be done? What can be done? Oh, my wife! my poor darling wife!

Then, I believe, I cried like a child. It seemed to me that all was lost. There was but one thing to be done—one course to be taken. My darling must give herself up to justice, and by her confession free this luckless wretch who now stands in peril of his life. She must bear the shame of the trial, and trust to human justice and the mercy which she had a right to expect. Oh, it was pitiful, pitiful! For a long while no alternative course suggested itself to me.

Human justice! What is justice? See how it can err! It can arrest, try, and—oh, horrible thought!—

perhaps condemn to death an innocent man! How then would it fare with Philippa? Who, now that marriage has sealed my lips, was there to prove her madness when she slew that man? I raged at the thought. It seemed to me that we were hard and fast in the toils. I might, it is true, call William, my servant, to swear that her manner was strange and wild upon that night. I might call the nurses to prove that when first they saw her she was recovering from an attack of mania. But would they be credited? Would not a clever lawyer soon convince twelve ordinary men that it was not her madness which prompted the crime, but the crime which produced the madness? We were indeed meshed and bound; hemmed in on every side; helpless and, it seemed, hopeless!

And Philippa must be told this! I must tell her! How could I nerve myself to make the truth known to her—now, of all times, when her health was all but restored; when a kind of sad but placid acquiescence in what fate had wrought seemed to be gradually coming over her; now, when I was once more building up hopes of happiness for her as well as for me! For I knew—ah! think of this, and pity me—that before another half year should pass there might be given to my wife and me a gift which would go far toward sweeping away the memories of gloom and horror which had of late spread over our lives. I even dared to hope, to feel certain, that as she gazed into baby eyes, as she pressed a tiny head to her bosom, some, nay, much of the lost sweetness and glory of life might return to my love.

Think of this, and picture me lying on the ground that day, with the damning intelligence fresh on my mind! Think that in a few hours I must return to my home, and tell my wife that the bolt had fallen! There was no alternative!

No alternative? Stay, there is an alternative! The blood seemed to course wildly through my veins, my heart beat fiercely, my lips grew dry, and a choking sensation came over me, as for the first time the simple yet certain way of cutting the knot of my difficulties flashed across my mind. So simple, so easy it at first appeared, that I laughed at my stupidity in not having seen it at once.

Tear that accursed paper to pieces, Basil North! Scatter those pieces to the winds. Forget what you have read. Go back to your luxurious, flower-bedecked home. Meet the one you love with a smile upon your face: you have forced smiles before now! Greet her as usual. Say nothing of this morning's news. Keep your own counsel; bury all you have learned in your secret heart. Do this, and be happy forever more!

But the man—the man who in a few days' time is to be tried for another's act? Well, what of him? The fool will doubtless be acquitted. Fool! Yes, it is the right term for one who can bring himself under suspicion. But if Justice runs on the wrong track until the end—if that man dies?

What then? What is this miserable life, what are a hundred lives when weighed against Philippa's happiness? What is conscience? What is right and wrong? What is the phantom which men call honor? What, after all, is crime? Be silent, and forget. You are asked to do no more. You have riches, youth, health, and strong will. The fairest woman on the earth adores you. Why hesitate? Why let one boor's life weigh in the scale?

Argue the matter in another way. Are not thousands of men slain every year by the whim of a monarch or a statesman? The thought of their death troubles not those who send them forth to fight. Men kill each other for revenge, for money, for a point of honor, and the killer lives on like other men live! Trust this man to the vaunted array of Justice. He is innocent, and will come from the ordeal unscathed. If found guilty, let him die. He will not be the first innocent man who has died, nor will he be the last to die. It is but one life! He is nothing to you; think of him no more. Come what may, you will always have your sunny home and the woman you love. Her children will grow up around you. Why hesitate? A life's happiness is to be won by simply sealing your lips. Its cost is but, supposing Justice blunders, to bear the burden of one man's death. A paltry price!

This was the temptation with which I wrestled during those long hours. Again and again I was on the point of yielding. Once or twice I rose to my feet with the fixed determination of destroying that paper, and letting things take their own course. Once or twice I even forced my steps some distance in the direction of home, but each time I turned, went back to the sheltered spot, threw myself again on the ground, and fought the battle anew.

No, I could not do this thing. I was a gentleman and a man of honor. Paltry as the price was when compared with what it might buy, I could not pay it. Although my whole soul was merged in Philippa's welfare, I could not, even for her sake, suffer an innocent man to be done unjustly to death. The crime was too black, too base, too contemptible! I felt sure that, with the man's blood morally on my head, the supremest joys which life could give would not lull my conscience to rest. I knew it would not be long before remorse and shame drove me to commit suicide.

Let the preachers say that sin is easy; that wrong is more alluring than right. There may be some sins which are easily committed, but I dare to say that there are others which the average man, educated by the code of honor, and dreading shame and cowardice, finds it far easier to avoid than to bring himself to commit. No, every sin is not easy!

But all the same my struggle was a mortal one. At times I fancy—it may be but fancy—that even now my mind bears some traces of that conflict; a conflict in which my victory meant ruin to my nearest and dearest. Was I not right when I said that my temptation was an all but unparalleled one? Yet in reasserting this let me humbly disclaim all credit for not having yielded. I strove to yield, but could not.

It was only when I had conquered, and put the temptation from me, that I was able to see how utterly useless such a crime as that urged upon me would have been. Doubtless Philippa, sooner or later, would have learned that Sir Mervyn Ferrand's supposed murderer had paid the penalty of the crime. How would it have fared with us then—then, when reparation was placed out of the question? Knowing as I did every thought of my wife's, every turn of her impulsive, sensitive nature, I was fain to tell myself that such news would be simply her death-blow.

But what was to be done? Finding that I could not compass the treachery which I dared to meditate, I cast about for another loophole of escape. What if I were to return to England, and accuse myself of the crime? To insure Philippa's safety I would right willingly give away my own life. It showed the state to which my mind was reduced when I say that I considered this scheme in all its bearings, and for a while thought it furnished a solution to my difficulties! I wonder if my brain was wandering?

I laughed in bitter merriment as the absurdity of my new plan forced itself upon me. I had forgotten Philippa, and what the effect of such a sacrifice would be upon her. I had forgotten that she loved me, even as I loved her; that my dying for her sake—for the sake of saving her from the consequences of that gruesome night—would make an expiation, if any were due from her, the most fearful which human or diabolical ingenuity could devise.

No! Neither by sinning against my fellow-man nor by a voluntary sacrifice of my own life could I save her. After all my protracted mental struggles, all my lonely hours of anguish and wild scheming, I was forced to return to the point from which I started. Philippa must surrender herself, and free this innocent man. There was, indeed, no alternative!

And a day gone, or all but gone! The trial on the twentieth! To reach England—to reach Tewnham in time to stop that trial, we must travel day and night. Day and night, across sunny or starlit Spain—across pleasant France—we must speed on, until we reached our own native land, now lying in all the rich calm of the early autumn. I must lead my wife, my love, to her doom!

I rose from the ground. I felt weary, and as if I had been cudgelled in every limb. I dragged myself slowly back to my home. "She must be told; she must be told. But how to tell her?" I muttered as I went along.

My appearance must have been wretched; for I received the impression that several grave-looking Sevillaños turned and looked after me as I passed by. Even as a cowardly felon who drags himself slowly to the scaffold, I dragged myself to the gate of our pleasant home, and on tottering feet passed into that fragrant space in which the happiest hours of my life had been spent.

As I entered, the remembrance of some tale which once I had read flashed through my mind—a tale of the ferocity of a by-gone age. It was of a prisoner who was forced by his captors to strike a dagger into the heart of the woman he loved. I know not where the tale is to be found or when I read it.

But it seemed to me that mine was a parallel case.

Pity me!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST HOPE.

THEY were sitting in the courtyard, my mother and my wife. They looked the embodiment of serene happiness. Their large fans—the use of the fan came like an inspiration to Philippa, my mother acquired it after much practice—were languidly waving to and fro. Philippa's rounded arm was outstretched; her fair left hand was in the clear water which fell from the fountain and filled a white marble basin, in which the gold carp darted about in erratic tacks. She was moving her fingers gently backward and forward, startling the timid fish, and half smiling at their terror. It seemed to me that my mother was remonstrating at the uproar she was creating in the brilliant-coated republic.

That picture is still in my mind. That picture! I can sit now in my chair, lay down my pen, and call up every picture of that time. Nothing, save the grief, has ever faded, or ever will fade, from my memory.

It was well for both of us that I had fought out the battle with myself in solitude, where no eye could see me, where I could see no one. Even as it was, knowing what a change my news must work, I paused, and a ghost of the day's temptation rose before me. But it rose too late. The die was cast. Philippa had seen me, and my mother's eyes followed hers. I braced myself up, and went toward them with as jaunty a manner as I could assume. My mother began a mock tirade on my shameful desertion of Philippa and herself. Her words carried no meaning to my ears. My eyes met those of my wife.

With her I made no attempt at concealment. Where was the good? The worst, the very worst had come. My eyes must have told her the truth.

I saw her sweet face catch fire with alarm. I saw her lips quiver. I saw the look of anguish flash into her eyes; yet I knew that I was helpless, utterly helpless.

She rose. I made some conventional excuse and went to my room. In a moment Philippa was at my side.

"Basil, husband, love," she whispered, "it has come!"

I laid my head on the table and sobbed aloud. Philippa's arms were wreathed around my neck.

"Dearest, I knew it must come. I have known it ever so long. Basil, do not weep. Once more, I tell you I am not worth such love as yours."

I covered her dear face with kisses. I strained her to my heart. I lavished words of love upon her. She smiled faintly, then sighed hopelessly—a sigh which almost broke my heart.

"Tell me all, my love," she said, calmly. "Let me know the very worst."

I could not speak; for the life of me the words would not come. With trembling hands I drew out the newspaper, and pointed to the fatal lines. She read them with a calm which almost alarmed me.

"I knew it must be," was all she said.

I threw myself on my knees before her. I embraced her. I was half distraught. Save for my wild ejaculations of undying love, there was silence for many minutes between us.

Presently, with great force, she raised my head, and looked at me with her sweet and sorrowful eyes.

"Basil, my dearest, you have been wrong. The right is right, the wrong is wrong. See what you have done! Had you not striven to save me, only I should have had to answer for this. Now it is you and me, and perhaps a third—an innocent, stainless life, that will be wrecked."

"Spare me! Spare me!" I said. "As you love me, spare me!"

She kissed me. "Dearest, forgive me. I should not blame you. Only I am to blame." Then, with a sudden change in her voice, "When do we start for England, Basil?"

Although I expected this question, I trembled and shuddered as I heard it. Too well I knew what England meant. It meant Philippa's standing in open court, in a prisoner's dock, the center of a gaping crowd, self-accused of the murder of her husband! And as I pictured this, once more, and for the last time, the temptation shook me.

I spoke, but I averted my eyes from hers. I could not meet them. My voice was husky and strange; it sounded like the voice of another man. A sort of undercurrent of thought ran through me, that if Philippa would but share it, I could bear any burden, any dishonor.

"Listen!" I said, in quick accents. "We are far away; safe. We love each other. We can be happy. Let the man take his chance. What does anything matter, so long as we love and are together?"

I felt that her eyes were seeking mine. I felt a change in the clasp of her hand. I knew that she was nobler and better than I.

"Basil," she said softly, and speaking like one in a dream, "it was not my husband, not the man I love, who said that. I forgive you for the sake of your great love, for the sake of all you have done, or tried to do, for me. Tell me now, when do we start for England?"

Her words brought back my senses. Never in the wildest height of my passion had I loved Philippa as I loved her at that moment. I besought her pardon. She gave it, and once more repeated her question.

With the calm of settled despair I consulted the railway-guide, and found that if we left Seville to-morrow morning by the first train, we might, by travelling day and night, early on the morning of the twentieth reach the town in which the trial was to be held. I made the result of my researches known to my wife; and upon my assuring her that we should have time to spare, she left all the arrangement of the journey to me.

After this, another painful question arose. Was my mother to be told? Philippa, who may, perhaps, in her secret heart have craved for a woman's support and sympathy in her approaching trial, at first insisted that my mother should be taken into our confidence—a confidence which, alas! in a few days' time would be gossip to the world. I besought her to waive the point, to spare my mother's feelings until the very last moment. We could not take her with us on our hurried journey. We were young; she was old. The fatigue, combined with the grief, would be more than her frame could endure. I could not bear to think of her waiting lonely in Seville for the bad news which she knew must come in a day or two from England. Let us say nothing respecting the wretched errand on which we are bound. Let us depart in secret, and leave some plausible explanation behind us.

To my relief, Philippa at last consented to this. Then, after a long, tearful embrace, we steeled ourselves to join my mother at the evening meal, and to bear ourselves so that she should suspect nothing of the tempest within our hearts. We did not very long subject ourselves to this strain upon our nerves. It seemed to me now that every moment spent otherwise than alone with my wife was a precious treasure wasted, a loss which I should forever regret. So very early we pleaded fatigue, and retired to our rest. Such rest!

Philippa bade my mother good-night with an embrace so long and passionate that I feared it would awaken alarm, especially when it was succeeded by my own veiled, but scarcely less emotional, adieu. For who could say that we should ever meet again? I do not believe it struck Philippa that in accompanying her I was running the slightest risk. Had she thought so, she would have insisted upon going alone. But I knew that the part I had played in that night's work would probably bring a severe punishment upon my own head. What did I care for that?

Silently and sadly in the retirement of our room we made our preparations for the journey, which began with the morn. There was no need to cumber ourselves with much luggage. We should rest in no bed until the trial was over. What resting-place might then be Philippa's, Heaven only knew! So our packing was soon completed.

Then I wrote a letter, to be given to or found by my mother in the morning. I told her that an important matter took me post-haste to England; that Philippa had determined to accompany me; that I would write as soon as we reached London. I gave no further explanation. I hoped she would attribute my sudden flight to the erratic nature which she often averred I possessed.

After all, the deception mattered little. In a week's time nothing would matter. Grief, overwhelming grief, would be my portion; a portion which, by her affection for me and for Philippa, my poor mother would be forced to share.

All being now ready for our start, we strove to win some hours of sleep. Our efforts were mocked to scorn. Through that, the last night we might spend alone together, I believe neither my wife nor myself closed an eyelid. Let me draw a veil over my wild distress and Philippa's calm acquiescence in her fate. Some grief is too sacred to describe.

Morning! Bright, broad, clear, cool, odorous morning! Our sleeplessness had at least spared us the anguish of awaking, and, while for a moment glorying in the beauty of the world, to remember what this morning meant to us. Giving ourselves ample time to reach the railway-station, we crept from our room, and, with eyes full of blinding tears, crossed the pleasant *patio*. I paused in the centre, and plucking a lovely spray from the great orange-tree, kissed it and gave it to my wife. Without a word she placed it in the bosom of her dress. As she drew her mantle aside to do so, for the first time I noticed that she wore the very dress which clad her on that fatal night. Although it was utterly unsuited to the almost tropical heat through which we should have to travel, I dared not remonstrate with her. Now, of all times, her slightest wish should be my law.

Noiselessly I undid the massive studded wooden gate, which at night-time closed the entrance to the *patio*. Unseen, we stepped into the shady, narrow street. Our luggage was light. I could carry it with ease to the station, which was not a great distance off. We were there only too soon.

We had to wait some time ere the train, which, following the example of the true Spaniard, declines on any consideration to be hurried, made its appearance. We took our seats in silence. At last the dignified train condescended to move onward. We sat side by side, and gazed and gazed in the direction of the beautiful city from which we were flying; gazed until we saw the very last of it, until even the great towering Giralda was lost to view. Then, and only then, I think we fully realized to what end we were speeding.

The next three days and nights seem now little more to me than a whirling dream. On and on we went to work out our fate; over the same ground which I had traversed, with scarcely less agitated feelings, some months ago. I ground my teeth when I thought how little my strenuous and seemingly successful efforts had availed. Now, not from any omission of precaution; not because the law compelled; not by the exercise of force; but simply on account of the great dictum of right and wrong, we were, of our own accord, retracing our steps to face the danger from which we had fled. Oh, bitter irony of destiny!

What was money to me now? Nothing but so much dross! It could do one thing, only one, that gold which I lavished so freely on that journey. It could assure that Philippa and I might travel alone. It could give us privacy for the time that journey lasted, that was all.

Yet although alone, we spoke but little. Our thoughts were not such as can be expressed by words. Her hand in mine, her head on my shoulder—sleeping when we could sleep, waking and looking into each other's faces—knowing that every mile of sunny or starlit country over which we passed brought us nearer to the end. Ah! I understood then how it is that lovers who are menaced by some great sorrow can kill themselves, and die smiling in each other's arms! We might have done so; but our deaths would have left to perish that stranger whom we were speeding to save.

So, as in a dream, the hours, the days, the nights, went by. We might have been travelling through the fairest scenery in the world, or through the most arid desert. I scarcely troubled to glance out of the carriage window. The world for me was inside.

It was after we left Paris—Paris, which to-day seemed all but within stone's-throw of London—that I aroused myself, and braced my energies to discuss finally with Philippa our proper plan of action. I felt that my right course would be to go straight to some solicitor, tell the tale, and ask him to put matters in train. But I could not bring myself to do this. Our secret was as yet our own. Moreover, through the misery of those hours, one ray of hope had broken upon me. If Philippa could be brought to yield to my guidance, to follow my instructions, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that we might be saved, and saved with clean hands.

"Dearest," I whispered, "to-night we shall be in London."

Her fingers tightened on mine. "And at Tewnham?" she said. "We shall be in time?"

"In ample time. But, Philippa, listen—"

"Basil, as you love me, not one word to tempt, to dissuade me!"

"Not one; but listen. Sweetest, if you will be guided by me, even now all may go well. This man—"

"The poor man who is standing in my place?"

"Yes; listen. Heaven forbid that I should tempt you. Think; he is, no doubt, a man of a lowly station in life. Philippa, I am rich, very rich."

"I do not understand you," she said, pressing her hand to her brow.

"Money will compensate for anything. Let him stand his trial. He is innocent. If there is justice in the land, he may, he must be found not guilty."

"But the agony of mind he must pass through!"

"For that I will pay him over and over again. He may be but a country boor, to whom a thousand pounds would be inexhaustible wealth. But, whatever his station, the compensation sent to him by an unknown hand shall make him bless the day which laid him under the false accusation. Reflect, look at the matter in every light. I swear to you that in my opinion we may, with a clear conscience, await the result of the trial."

She sighed, but made no answer. Her silence was a joy to me. It told me that my specious argument carried weight. I took her hands and kissed them. I told her again and again that I loved her; that my life as well as hers depended on her yielding.

It was long before she yielded. The thought of a fellow-creature lying in prison, perhaps for months, and to-morrow to stand in shame before his judges, on account of a deed which she herself had done, was anguish to her noble nature. Then, growing desperate at seeing the only plank which could save us from the wreck spurned for the sake of what, in my present mood, I was able to believe too finely strained a scruple, I used my last and, as I rightly judged, my most powerful argument. I told her that it would be not only she who would suffer for that unconscious act, but that I, her husband, must pay the penalty due from an accessory after the crime.

Heaven forgive me for the anguish my words caused that loving heart! Philippa, on whom the intelligence of my danger fell like a thunderbolt, sank back in her seat, pale and trembling. Had I ever doubted that my wife's heart-whole love was my own, that look would have dispelled the doubt.

She prayed and besought me to leave her at the next station; to let her finish the journey and make her avowal alone. My reply was short, but sufficiently long to put all hope of my consenting to such a course out of her head. Then, for my sake, she yielded.

"On one condition—one only," she said.

"Be guided by me in this. In all else you shall do as you like."

"I must be in the court, Basil. I must hear the trial. If the worst happen, there must not be the delay of a moment; then and there I must proclaim the truth."

"You shall be at hand—close at hand. I will be present."

"No! I must be there. I must hear and see all. If the man is found guilty, I must, before his horrible sentence is pronounced, stand up and declare his innocence."

"All that could be done afterward."

"No; it must be done then. Basil, fancy—put yourself in his place! Nothing could atone for his anguish at hearing himself condemned to death for a crime he knows nothing of. I must be there. Promise me I shall be there, and for your sake I will do as you wish."

It was the best concession I could get. I promised. I concealed the fact that if, when sentence was pronounced, a woman rose in the body of the court, and asserted the prisoner's innocence and her own guilt, the probabilities were she would be summarily ejected. This made no difference. Let Philippa be silent; let the man be found not guilty, and the next train could bear us back to Seville.

Yes, even now there was hope!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRIMINAL COURT.

WE reached Charing Cross at four o'clock on the morning of September 20th. The first train by which we could get to Tewnham was timed to leave Liverpool Street at seven, so that we had an hour or two to spare for such refreshment as we cared to take, such rest as we dared to allow ourselves. What with the fatigue of continuous travel, and the dread of what this day was to bring forth, it may be easily believed that we were thoroughly worn out. We were, indeed, more fitted to go to bed and sleep for a week, than to proceed upon the last stage of our dismal journey.

But there was no help for it. If we meant to be in time, we must go on by the early morning train. I begged my wife to lie down, and endeavor to snatch an hour's sleep. She refused firmly. Much of that calm which had characterized her since the moment when I broke the fatal news to her had vanished. Its place was now taken by an excitement, suppressed, but nevertheless clearly manifest to my eyes. The fear that we should not reach Tewnham in time for the trial seemed to haunt her unceasingly. It was for this reason she so peremptorily refused to lie down and court sleep. She feared lest, our eyes once closed, we should, from sheer exhaustion, sleep for hours, and so miss the morning train. She was ever picturing the horror of that poor unknown man's being led from the dock, with the death sentence ringing in his ears.

So the time which elapsed before we started for Tewnham we spent in the hotel. I bespoke rooms by telegram, sent when we reached Folkestone. We made an apology for a meal; in fact, what we could get at that time of night was of itself little more than apology. We sat all but silent, watching the hands of the clock, which told us how fast the precious moments were passing away. We saw the gray morning struggle with, and at last conquer, the yellow gas-light. We heard the hum of traffic growing louder and louder in the streets below us. Then we turned to make what may be rightly called our last adieus. Who could say that to-day my wife and I might not be parted forever?

While at the hotel I tried to obtain the file of the *Times*. I wanted to look back and see if I could find the account of magisterial proceedings against this unlucky William Evans. He must, of course, have appeared before the lesser tribunal, and could I see the account of his appearance, I should be able to judge as to the strength of the case against him. But the file was not forthcoming. Perhaps it did not exist; perhaps the sleepy-eyed Teutonic waiter did not understand what I wanted; so, still in the dark as to why suspicion should have fallen upon this innocent man, we left the hotel and drove to Liverpool Street Station.

At nine o'clock our journey was ended. We stood on the platform of Tewnham railway-station. My poor wife wore a thick black veil, so her face I could not see; but I knew it was as pale as death. Now and again her hand, which rested on my arm, pressed it convulsively. I think we were the most unhappy pair on the earth!

We were even denied the time for any more farewells or expressed regrets. The hour was chiming from the old cathedral tower. The business of the Courts, I knew, always began at ten o'clock, and considering the crowd which would most surely be attracted by so interesting a case as this trial for murder committed so many months ago, I felt sure that unless we proceeded at once to the Shirehall, our chance of gaining entrance would be but a small one. I hailed one of the close cabs which were waiting outside the station.

As I did so I felt a heavy hand laid upon my shoulder, and heard a rich, pleasant-sounding, and not unfamiliar voice exclaim, "Basil North, as I'm a sinner!"

That any one should at this moment address Basil North in a merry way seemed a positive incongruity. I turned round almost angrily, and found myself face to face with an old friend. He was a barrister named Grant; a man four or five years my senior, but one with whom, before I forswore the society of my fellow-men, I had been on intimate terms. I had not seen him for a considerable time; but had heard, casually, that he was making great strides in his forensic career.

In spite of my distress, I returned his greeting, and grasped his hand warmly. After all it seemed a relief to find that I had a friend left in the world.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"The only thing that could bring me to such a place—circuit work. I have an important case on to-day. That's the worst of a place so near London as this one. One is tempted to spend the nights in town, which means getting up at an unholy hour in the morning. But you! Why are you here? I heard you were as rich as Midas, and living abroad in luxury."

"I have been abroad for some time. I hope to go back again very soon."

"Happy man!" he ejaculated. I could scarcely keep the bitter smile from my lips, as I thought how ill applied were his words.

As he spoke he glanced at Philippa, whose grace and beauty of form defied the concealment attempted by thick veil and sombre garments.

"But what brings you to this sleepy old town?" continued Grant.

I hesitated for a moment. Then, thinking that truth, or at least half truth, was the best, told him I had come down to witness the trial for murder.

"I should doubt your getting into court," he said. "The morbid interest excited around about here is, I am told, very great. The sheriff is besieged by applications for tickets."

"Couldn't you help me? The fact is, I have a particular reason, not mere curiosity, for wishing to be present at this trial."

"I don't think I can," said Grant. "Does your—the lady wish to go with you?"

"My cousin—yes," I said, seeing that he expected an introduction. He raised his hat, and made some courteous and pleasant remark, to which Philippa, to my surprise, replied in a calm and fitting way.

Grant knew I had no sister. I called her cousin because I had a wild hope that, if the worst happened, I might be able to conceal the true relationship in which we stood, and so be permitted to give evidence on her behalf. I trusted my wife would guess that I had a good reason for this deception.

"Try and manage this for me, Grant," I said so earnestly that my friend made no further demur.

"Take me in your cab, and I will see what I can do."

During our drive to the Shirehall I asked Grant what he knew about the impending trial.

"Nothing," he said frankly. "I hate murder cases—hate even to read about them. Of course I know that Sir Mervyn Ferrand was killed, and hidden in the snow for days and days. But I know no more."

"Who is the accused?"

"I don't know. I thought, from your anxiety, you must know him."

"Will he be found guilty?"

"I don't know. Stay, I heard some one who ought to be well informed say yesterday that the case for the prosecution was most feeble. He seemed to doubt if the grand jury would return a true bill."

As I heard this I pressed Philippa's hand secretly. I felt that she was trembling.

The drive to the Shirehall occupied only a few minutes. We did not go to the public entrance, in front of which I could see a crowd of people nearly blocking up the street. We stopped at another door, and Grant, after looking round, caught sight of what appeared to be an inspector of police. He entered into a little conversation with him, the result of which was that we were given into his care.

"This is a breach of the law," whispered my friend as he bade me good-by. "You will have to atone for it by a handsome gratuity."

We followed our guide. Philippa, although walking with a firm step, leaned heavily upon my arm. I scarcely know by what door we entered that palace of justice. The stalwart policeman led us through stone corridors and passages, which re-echoed with the tread of our feet, and at last we found ourselves before a double swinging plain oak door, over which in old English letters was written "Criminal Court."

I felt Philippa shudder, and knew that the sight of those words brought the horror of the situation fully home to her. Mechanically I pressed a sovereign in the hand of the venial inspector, or whatever he was; then, holding my wife's hand, I passed through the noiseless swinging door into the all but empty court.

A few policemen and other officials were lounging about. Two or three people, who had no doubt gained admittance in the same way as we had done, were seated in various coigns of vantage. I led Philippa up the broad steps, and pointed to one of the hard wooden benches provided for the accommodation of the general public. These benches were raised step by step, one above another. We chose our position about half-way up, on the right-hand side of the court. Philippa, with her thick veil falling down to her chin, and so defying recognition, sank wearily into her seat. I placed myself beside her; my hand crept under the cloak she wore and held her hand.

Surely it was all a dream—a dreadful, realistic dream! I should wake and find myself under the great orange tree in that courtyard in gay Seville, my half-smoked cigar and the book which I had been lazily reading lying at my feet; my mother opposite me, laughing at my somnolency, and Philippa's grave dark eyes looking with calm everlasting love into my own. I should wake and find the cool of the evening had succeeded to the glare of the afternoon. We should walk through the merry streets, lounge in the Alameda, wander through the glowing Alcazar gardens, or drive out miles and miles over the fertile smiling plains. Or I should even wake and find myself nodding over my fire in my lonely cottage, the stolid William the only human creature within hail; Philippa's return, the snow-storm, the dreadful discovery, the flight, Seville, the marriage—all, all a dream!

In a kind of stupor—the temporary reaction, I suppose, consequent upon such fatigue and trouble—I gazed round me, and wondered where I was.

What is this great empty building, lit from one side by large clerestory windows of ecclesiastical design? What are these dull gray vacant walls; that lofty ceiling crossed and cut into small squares by dark rafters; this leaded floor, on which feet fall all but noiselessly? What are those raised boxes on either side of the building—those small railed platforms all but adjoining them, and all but adjoining that panelled oak structure at the end facing me? What is that rectangular box-shaped erection with overhanging carved cornice? Let us away from this dismal, colorless place! Let me wake and find myself amid the flowers, orange trees, the fair sights and surroundings of our Spanish home.

No! I have but to turn my dazed eyes to the centre of space in which we sat, to know that I am dreaming no dream; that we must wait here and learn our fates. That oblong wooden enclosure with high sides, topped by a light iron railing, brings reality back to me. It is the prisoner's dock. In an hour's time a man will stand there. He will be brought up those stone steps which lead to it from below, the topmost flag of which I can just see. He will stand there for hours. As he leaves the dock, declared innocent or guilty, so will our lives be declared happy or miserable.

My hand holds my wife's yet closer; for the last minutes which may be ours to spend together are slipping by so fast, so very fast!

See, the clock under the balcony marks half-past nine. The all but deserted court begins to assume the appearance of preparing for business. Policemen and other officials pass to and fro, some arranging papers, some replenishing ink-bottles, and placing quill pens ready for the barristers and solicitors who will soon fill those front seats. Some one, with what seems to me bitter irony, places a magnificent bouquet of flowers on either hand of the judge's vacant chair. What have flowers in common with such a scene as this? Flowers, too, which are beautiful enough to recall to my mind the fair Spanish home, which, maybe, we shall see no more. Flowers in this den of sorrow! Rather should every seat, every beam be draped in black.

Now the doors on each side of the court open, and remain open. I hear a shuffling of many feet. People, in a continuous stream, pass through the entrance, and wend their way to the portion of the court allotted to the general public. So fast, so thick they come, that in ten minutes this space is thronged almost to suffocation. Philippa and I are pressed closer and closer to each other, as every inch of the bench on which we are seated is appropriated. The court is full.

Crowded by respectable-looking, well-dressed people, who have gained admission, as I heard, by favor of the sheriff. Yet, respectable as they are, each man, each woman, rushes in eagerly and strives for the best available seat. And for what reason? To see and hear a poor wretch tried for his life! In my bitter mood I look with hate on these sensation-seekers. I hate them even more when I think that their morbid craving for excitement may be satisfied with such food as they little expect; and I clinch my teeth as I picture the scene at that moment when Philippa, in pursuance of her immovable resolution, rises, and makes her effort to proclaim her own guilt and the convicted man's innocence. Although I strive to force the picture from my mind, by telling myself that justice cannot err, that the man will be acquitted, yet again and again the dread of the worst seizes me, and I hate every face in that crowd, which may, by and by, be gaping, with looks of wonder and curiosity, at the woman I love!

As in a haze, I see some faces which are familiar to me. A number of gentlemen enter, and seat themselves on the benches which counsel usually occupy. Some few of these I knew by sight. They are country gentlemen from the neighborhood of Roding, who are now called to serve on the grand jury. I see also the thin-faced, hawkish-looking woman who calls herself Mrs. Wilson. I am thankful that she takes a seat in front of us and does not see us. She, like ourselves, must know that an innocent man is this day about to be tried.

So for half an hour I sit, gazing now at the crowd of people, now at the empty dock and vacant bench in front of me; listening to the hum of conversation which rises from the packed court; longing for the moment to come when this dreadful suspense may end; yet all the same dreading and willing to put off that moment. And all the while Philippa, in her black garb, close to me and, unseen by our neighbors, holding my hand.

Hush! The door at the back of the bench opens, and at ten o'clock to the minute the red-robed judge appears. He bows to the court, seats himself, and by his action signifies that he is ready to begin the business of the day. No trembling prisoner in the dock ever scanned a judge's face with more anxiety than I scan his lordship's at this present moment.

An old man, too old, it seems to me, for such a responsible post; an amiable, pleasant-looking man—not, I venture to think, one who can bear the reputation of being a "hanging judge." I breathe a prayer that he may this day be able to direct aright the course of justice.

Hush! Hush! Silence in the court! Oh, my poor, sweet wife, let me grasp that hand yet closer, for the moment which for days and nights has never been absent from our minds has come! What will it bring us?

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLACK CAP.

THERE is silence, or all but silence, in the court. The buzz of suppressed conversation sinks almost to nothing—absolutely to nothing as the judge's marshal rises, and after gabbling through the mysterious proclamation which begins "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" declares the court open.

Philippa, still closely veiled, sits like a statue. Her hand, which ever grasps mine, scarcely responds to the pressure by which again and again I endeavor to bid her hope for the best. I would give much if even now I could get her to consent to my leading her away. I dare not suggest this. I know that doing so would be waste of words.

The court is open. The red judge is perusing letters and papers which lie in front of him as calmly and unconcernedly as if the life's happiness of, at least, one man and woman, did not greatly depend upon the view he takes of the case about to be tried. He raises one of his bouquets and inhales the perfume of the flowers. How can one in his position behave like an ordinary mortal? Were we not here, he might condemn an innocent man to a shameful death! I wonder if, with such horrible responsibility resting on him, a judge can ever really be a happy man?

These thoughts seem trivial; but my mind is by now in a strange state; it is, indeed, so sensitive that every slight incident, every small ceremonial, of to-day seems to be impressed forever upon it.

A bewigged gentleman—the clerk of assize, the man next me tells his neighbor—rises and calls name after name, until he has fixed upon the twenty-three gentlemen needed to form the grand jury. They stand up in their places, and, in batches of four, are rapidly sworn. The absurd proclamation against vice and immorality is read; much good may it do every one present! Then the clerk sits down, and the judge, forsaking his papers, begins his work.

He arranges his robes to his satisfaction, leans forward, and, placing the tips of his long white fingers together, addresses—charges, I am told, is the right term—the grand jury in a pleasant, colloquial manner. I strain every aural nerve to catch the purport of his glib words. He is sure to say something about this important murder case. I shall, perhaps, be able to learn how it was that the man fell under suspicion.

Alas! the judge is one who by dint of years of practice has acquired the knack of using his voice only just so much as is absolutely necessary. The grand jury is close to him, and can, no doubt, hear him; but to those who, like ourselves, are far away in the background of the court, his remarks are inaudible. All I can catch is a closing caution to the grand jury, to bear in mind that it is not within its province to determine the innocence or guilt of the prisoners, but to simply decide whether there is or is not sufficient evidence for the cases to go to trial.

The grand jury files out of court to conduct its solemn deliberations in the place appointed. The judge addresses a few smiling words to the sheriff and other magnates who, by right or favor, occupy seats on the bench; then he returns to the perusal of his papers.

For the first time since we entered the court Philippa speaks to me. "Are they trying him now?" she asks in a low awed whisper, yet in a voice so changed that I know what the suspense is costing her. Briefly I explain the procedure of the law, so far as I know it. She sighs, and says no more.

More monotonous calling of many names, to which summons, however, another class of men respond. The common jurymen are now being called. Probably, to save time, twelve men are sent into the box, where they sit, some appearing to enjoy the dignity of the position, some with stolid indifference, others with acute unhappiness plainly manifested. I look at these men with scarcely less interest than I look at the judge. On them, or on some of them, our fate rests as much, perhaps more, than it rests on him. Those men are trying us—not only the man who will by and by stand in that rail-topped enclosure into which we look down.

Twenty long weary minutes pass by. All eyes turn to a wooden gallery in the right-hand corner of the court. A door in the wall opens. The members of the grand jury emerge and fill the gallery. The foreman arms himself with a gigantic fishing-rod, to which he attaches a paper, which is conveyed by this clumsy method to that busy gentleman, the clerk of assize. What idiotic foolery all this seems to me!

The clerk detaches the document, glances at it, and looks up at the gallery.

"Gentlemen of the grand jury, you return a true bil against William Evans for murder?"

"We do," answers the foreman with shy solemnity.

I grind my teeth. Fools! If men of culture and standing err like this, what can be expected from a common jury? It is well for me that I heard the caution just now given by the judge. I take such comfort as I can by thinking they have tried the evidence, not the man. What can the evidence be? Ah! we shall soon know.

The clerk turns, and, addressing no one in particular, says, "Bring up the prisoner." Once more I set my teeth. I feel my wife's arm tremble; her hand grows cold. I hear a buzz, as of expectation, run through the crowded court. Every eye turns in one direction—toward the empty dock. For a moment a species of dizziness comes over me; objects swim before my eyes. The sensation passes away. I recover myself. The dock is no longer untenanted. In the centre, with a stalwart policeman on either side of him, stands the accused—the man who, if needs be, must be saved by such a sacrifice!

From my place, far back in the public gallery, I can, of course, see nothing more of the prisoner than his back. I gaze at this with intense curiosity, endeavoring to determine the station of the man who is now about to be tried for his life. I can but gather this much: He is tall and slight. His dress is of a semi-respectable nature, but seems to have seen much service. He might be anything from a broken-down clerk to a gentleman's servant out at elbows. I rejoice at his poverty-stricken appearance. Judging from it, money will be welcome to him. Let the jury but assert his innocence, and I feel certain that the liberal pecuniary compensation which it is my intention to mete out will repay him a hundred times for the ordeal which he is undergoing.

Ordeal! Yes, it is the right word. It is easy to see it is a terrible ordeal to the poor fellow. No need to look at his face to be told that much. Even as he emerged from the cells below he seemed to quake with fear. Now he absolutely falls forward in the dock, supporting himself by grasping the iron railing which runs round the top. I notice that his fingers, as they cling to the iron bars, open and close convulsively. Every movement of his back and shoulders betrays fear and anguish of mind. His state is pitiable, so pitiable that one of his custodians places his hand under the wretched man's arm, and gives him the physical support which he so sorely needs. He bends his head as in shame, and I know that could I see his face, it would be white as my own or my wife's.

In spite of the strain upon my mind, I was able to wonder at the prisoner's hopeless demeanor. Although I had, as it were, torn my very heart out by the roots to insure this man's safety in the event of things going wrong with him; although I did not even now regret the course I had taken, I am bound to say that his cowardly behavior took away much of the sympathy which I should otherwise have felt for him in his unmerited predicament. It is, of course, very easy to say what one would do if in another's place. I certainly felt sure that, were I in that poor fellow's plight, consciousness of my own innocence would give me strength enough to raise my head, and face boldly all the judges, juries, and prosecuting counsel in the world. I was willing to make every allowance for the nervousness natural to such a position; but I groaned inwardly as I gazed upon that miserable, limp, half-standing, half-reclining form.

Why does he not stand upright? Too well I know that another is watching that abject wretch with interest even more intense than mine. I know that every attitude of shame or fear is understood by Philippa, and adds to the scruples which she feels at following my advice and awaiting the result of the trial. Every agonized movement of the prisoner in the dock seems to be faintly reproduced by the hand within my own. Every pang he suffers runs through the frame of the woman who knows that he is suffering for her deed.

The clerk reads over the indictment: "That he, William Evans, did feloniously, wilfully, and of malice aforethought kill and murder Sir Mervyn Ferrand, Baronet." As the reading proceeds Philippa draws me toward her. "Basil," she says in a low whisper, "this is more dreadful than I dreamed of. I cannot bear it longer. Think of that poor man's anguish! Basil, he also may have a wife who loves him; she may be in the court. Think of her! Oh! what can I do? What can I do?"

"Nothing—nothing but wait and hope," I answer.

"Could you not go down and speak to him, or send a message in some way? Tell him not to be so wretched; that even at the last moment he will be saved; that the real murderer will confess and free him. Basil, you must do this."

"I can not. I dare not. It would ruin us. Hush, dearest; be calm, and listen."

The reading of the indictment is now over. The clerk turns to the prisoner. "Are you guilty or not guilty?" he asks in a clear voice. Although every one in that court knows what the answer will be, there is a silence so profound that a pin might be heard drop. Every one seemed desirous of hearing the prisoner's voice. Even I, myself, lean forward, and strain every nerve to hear his plea.

There is a long, dread pause. It may be that the prisoner does not understand that he is expected to reply. It may be that his collapsed state deprives him of the power of speech. I notice that one of the policemen touches him on the shoulder and whispers to him. Still for a moment there is silence.

It is broken, but not by the prisoner. Philippa gives a low, soft wail, heard only, I think, by me.

"I can bear it no longer," she whispers. She snatches her hand from mine. She throws back her thick, dark veil, and stands erect in the body of the court. I cast one glance at her pale but determined-looking face, then bow my head upon my hands, and wish that death might at that moment smite us both. All is over! I am conquered!

Even as I hide my face I see every eye in that thronged court turning to the tall, majestic, dark-robed figure which rises in the midst of that motley throng. Then, clear and loud, I hear her beloved voice ring out.

"My lord," I hear her say. I raise my head at the sound. The eyes of bench, bar, jury, and public are fixed upon her. The very prisoner turns in the dock and gazes straight at her.

She gets no further than those two words. "Order in the court! Order in the court!" is shouted so sternly and fiercely that she all but loses her presence of mind. She falters, she hesitates, and glances helplessly around. I seize the moment. By sheer force I drag her back to her seat. I pray her by the love she bears me to wait in silence. I draw the veil over her face, to hide it from the hundreds of curious eyes which are turned upon it.

While so doing, I hear the sharp mandate, "Turn that person out of court."

Had any serious attempt been made to put the order in force, I believe that Philippa would have resisted, and once more attempted to assert the prisoner's innocence and her own guilt—if it was guilt. Fortunately the policeman who draws near us to carry out the order is my friend of the morning who had accepted my gold. It may be on this account he favors us. It may be, when a momentary disturbance subsides, and the perpetrator does not seem bent upon repeating it, that the expulsion is not insisted upon. It may be that Philippa's accosting the judge was looked upon as a solecism brought about by the excitement of a weak woman who was in some way connected with the prisoner. I suppose such a scene does sometimes occur; and perhaps, if its repetition is guarded against, a humanely-minded judge will not deny the offender the sorry comfort of seeing her friend's trial to the end. Perhaps the judge who this day presides is unusually good-natured and easy-going. Any way, our friendly policeman does not carry out his instructions, and the court resumes its business.

But many curious looks are cast at the veiled woman by my side. I notice that the hawk-faced Mrs. Wilson turns in her seat, and looks always at us; and, strange to say, I notice that the prisoner in the dock is still staring fixedly in our direction. The policemen take him by the arms; face him round toward the bench. Once more the solemn question, "Are you guilty or not guilty?" is asked.

A short excited pause. The prisoner answers. Well, I know what he says, although he speaks so faintly that I do not hear his voice. Strange to say, his answer seems to create considerable agitation. People who are near to him look back and whisper to those in the rear. A barrister turns in his seat, and stares in a dumbfounded way at a gentleman behind him. This gentleman rises up fussily, and bustles round to the dock, where for a minute he seems to be engaged in earnest conversation with the prisoner. The latter shakes his head sullenly and hopelessly. In an apparently highly-excited state, the gentleman, whom I rightly judge to be solicitor for the defence, hurries back, whispers to the barrister, and seems by his gesture to be washing his hands of some responsibility.

What does it all mean? Why do they not go on with the trial? The suspense is growing more than I can bear. Hush! The judge speaks.

The excitement is spreading through the court. In spite of the warning looks of the authorities, people are whispering to each other. The judge is speaking earnestly to the prisoner. He seems to be explaining something, counselling something. Still the man shakes his head sullenly. What does it all mean?

Mean! The next solemn action, the next solemn words of the red-robed judge answer my question, and tell me that a thing has come to pass which never entered within the range of probability. Or have I been asleep? Has the trial been gone through, and the worst, the very worst, happened? No; five minutes ago I pulled Philippa back to her seat, and forced her to withhold her damning words. Even now my grasp is on her to prevent her from rising.

Ha! Look! The judge places a square of black silk upon his head. The prisoner cowers down. He would fall, were it not for the arms which support him on either side. A rustle of intense feeling runs through the court. Men catch their breath; women's eyes are distended. The sensation-seekers are rewarded. Hark! The judge speaks. I can hear him plainly now, although there is deep emotion in his voice.

"Prisoner at the bar, you are guilty, by your own confession, of an atrocious, cold-blooded murder, the motive for which is known but to yourself and your God. For me only the painful duty remains—"

Guilty! On his own confession! The man guilty! The man to save whom we have travelled night and day—he the criminal! Philippa, my peerless Philippa! my wife! my love! Innocent! innocent! This—this revulsion of feeling is more than human nature can bear!

"Order in the court! Order in the court!" What is it? Who is it? Only a woman in a dead faint. She is borne out tenderly, lovingly, proudly, by a man who clasps his precious burden to a heart full of such rapture as few of his fellow-creatures can ever have known.

But let it also be hoped that few have ever endured such grief and anguish!

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHERE ARE THE SNOWS THAT FELL LAST YEAR?"

ALTHOUGH, while engaged in the labor of writing this story, I have many times regretted that I am nothing more than a plain narrator of facts and incidents, not a master of fiction, I think I have not yet felt the regret so strongly as at the moment when I begin this chapter. The sombre acts of the life-drama in which Philippa and I played parts so painful, so full of grief, and even if brightened by a ray of joy, of joy fallacious and of uncertain tenure—these acts I have found little difficulty in describing; I had simply to throw my mind back to the pictures of the past and reproduce them in words. The task, whether well or ill done, was not a hard one.

But now, when in one moment and as if by magic every thing changed; when sorrow seemed to be simply swept out of our lives; when that poor abject wretch's confession of guilt, forced from him in some mysterious way, not only left our whole future bright and cloudless, but consigned to rest all the ghosts of the past, whose shadowy forms had hitherto dogged our steps and denied us the happiness rightly due to those who love as we loved; now it is that I feel my shortcomings acutely, and wish my pen was more powerful than it is.

And yet a word will describe the state of my own mind as, when the last solemn words were spoken by the judge—spoken in a voice which showed emotion and distress at being compelled to condemn a fellow-creature to death—I carried my fainting wife from the crowded, reeking court. The momentary sense of rapture passed away; bewilderment, sheer bewilderment, is the word for what was left. I could not think. All my reasoning faculties had left me. In fact, I believe that had Philippa not swooned, and so needed my mechanically given care, I myself should have fallen senseless on that threshold which an hour before we crossed, thinking we were going to endless misery.

I remember this much. As I laid Philippa on one of the hard wooden benches in the stone corridor I kept repeating to myself, "Innocent, my love is innocent; that man is guilty." I suppose this continual reiteration was an endeavor to impress the tremendous fact upon my brain, which for a time was incredulous and refused to entertain it.

I threw up my wife's veil and bathed her face with water, which was brought me by a kindly policeman. Presently her eyes opened, and consciousness returned; she strove to speak.

My presence of mind was fast returning. "Dearest," I whispered, "as you love me, not a word in this place. In a minute we will leave it."

She was obedient; but I knew from the wild look of joy in her eyes that obedience tasked her to the utmost. She was soon able to rise, and then we walked from the court, pushed our way through the crowd who waited in the street, busily discussing the sudden termination to the trial, threw ourselves into a cab, and in another moment were alternately weeping and laughing in each other's arms.

It was, however, but for a moment. The inn to which we drove was close at hand. There we were shown into a room, and were at last free to give the fullest vent to our pent-up feelings.

It would be absurd for me to attempt to reproduce our words, our disjointed exclamations. It would be sacrilege for me to describe the tears we shed, the embraces, the loving caresses we lavished on each other. Think of us an hour, one short hour ago! Think of us now! The curse laid upon us by that awful night removed forever! Our secret kept, or secrecy, if still advisable, no longer absolutely needful. Philippa, in spite of all I had seen, in spite of all she had told me on that night when I found her, a wild, distracted woman, in a storm the wildest that years have known, guiltless of her husband's death! Innocent not only as she had in my eyes always been, but also, what was far more, innocent in her own eyes!

Small wonder that for nearly an hour we sat with our arms twined around each other, and used few words which were more than rapturous exclamations of love and joy.

There! I cannot, will not describe the scene more fully. I will say no more, except this: when at last we grew calmer, Philippa turned to me, and once more I saw terror gathering in her eyes.

"Basil," she said, "it is true—it must be true?"

"True! of course it is."

"That man, the prisoner, could not have pleaded guilty when he was innocent."

"Why should he? It meant death to him, poor wretch."

"But why did he confess?"

"Who can tell? Remorse may have urged him to do so."

Philippa rose, and her next words were spoken quickly and with excitement.

"No, I did not do it. The thought, the dream haunted me, but I did not believe it until I heard those men talk of the way he died. Then it all came back to me. The mad storm, the dead man over whom I stood; even then I don't think I actually believed it. It was when you told me how you found me, that I lost all hope."

"Dearest, forgive me. I should have believed in the impossibility of the act even in your delirium, even if I had seen it done. Philippa, say you forgive me."

She threw her arms around me. "Basil, my husband," she whispered, "you have done much for me, do one thing more; find out the whole truth—find out why this man killed him, how he killed him; find out, satisfy me that his confession was a true one; then, Basil, such happiness as I have never even dreamed of will be mine!"

"And mine!" I echoed.

I promised to do as she wished. Indeed, the moment I had recovered my senses, I resolved to learn everything that could be learned. Once and for all I would clear away every cloud of doubt, although that cloud might be no bigger than a man's hand.

But Philippa must not stop in Tewnham. Her strange conduct during the trial, her fainting-fit after it, were bound to have attracted the attention of those present. No doubt she was looked upon as a friend of the prisoner, who was overpowered by the sudden and awful ending to the case. Still, she must not stay at Tewnham.

We went to London by an afternoon train. The next morning I again ran down to the place at which the trial was held. I ascertained the name of the convict's solicitor, and as soon as I found him at leisure requested the favor of an interview.

I found him apparently a worthy, respectable man, but of a nature inclined to be choleric. I told him I called on him because I was much interested in the case of the convict William Evans. Mr. Crisp, that was his name, frowned and fidgeted about with some papers which were in front of him.

"I would rather not talk about the case," he said sharply. "Nothing for many years has so much annoyed me."

"Why? Your client only met with his deserts."

"True—true. But I am a lawyer, sir. Our province is not to think so much of deserts as of what we can do for a client. It is hard to try and serve a fool."

"No doubt; but I scarcely understand your meaning."

"Meaning! I could have saved that man. There was no evidence to speak of against him. What did it amount to? A pistol of a peculiar make found in a field half a mile away from the scene of the murder; one man who could swear that the pistol was my client's property—a pawnbroker, to whom he wanted to sell it. Positively, sir, that was the whole case for the Crown. Never so disgusted in my life—never!"

The excitable little man's looks showed that his disgust was not assumed.

So the pistol which I had thoughtlessly hurled away had, after all, furnished the clew and brought the criminal to justice. Although I was not quite satisfied that the right person was to suffer for the dark crime, I resolved to get all the additional information I could.

"But why did he plead guilty?" I asked.

"Because he was a fool," rapped out Mr. Crisp. "It was like committing suicide. I don't care a button for the man himself; but I confess I was annoyed at seeing my case all knocked to pieces by his obstinacy. I went to him; if you were in court, you no doubt saw me. I begged him to withdraw his plea. I told him I could save him. Yet the fool insisted."

"Did penitence or remorse urge him?"

"I don't know. He could have had more time for penitence and remorse if he had let me save him from the gallows. No; he says, 'It's no good—not a bit of good. You don't know all I know. There's some one in court who knows all about it—saw it all done. She's come to hang me.' I have no idea what he meant."

I started. I knew what the man meant. He, in common with every one else in that court, had turned and looked at Philippa as she rose from her seat and addressed the judge. It was the sight of Philippa that had taken away the wretch's last hope of escape.

"I wash my hands of the fellow, of course," continued Mr. Crisp; "but I did take the trouble to inquire if any witnesses for the prosecution had been allowed to enter the court. I am assured they were all kept in waiting outside."

I sat for some moments in deep thought. The solicitor looked at me, as if he fancied I had already taken up as much of his valuable time as he could spare.

"Is there any way of gaining access to the condemned man?" I said. "Could you, for instance, get an order to see him?"

"No doubt I could; but I have no object in seeing him."

"I will give you an object," I said. "I want you to see that man, and, if possible, get a written, or at least dictated, confession from him—not of the bald fact that he is guilty, but of all particulars connected with the murder."

Mr. Crisp looked surprised, and expressed his opinion that it was all but impossible to obtain what I wanted.

I had taken rather a fancy to the brisk-spoken, sharp little man. He seemed to me trustworthy; so that, after consideration, I determined to confide to him my reason for making this request. Under the assurance of professional secrecy, I told him briefly so much as I thought fit of Philippa's and my own connection with the events of that night. He listened with an interest which augured well for the reception which awaits the sombre tale I now give to the world. His curiosity seemed excited, and he promised to see the convict, and, if possible, learn all I wanted to know. I left my address, and bade him good-day.

I did not care to linger at Tewnham; so I walked down to the railway-station, intending to return to town by the next train. As I waited on the platform a down-train came in. A sudden impulse seized me. The day was still young. I had time to spare. I crossed the bridge, entered the train, and in a quarter of an hour was at Roding. I went there because I was impelled by a desire to once more visit the actual scene of the beginning of all these troubles.

I walked that road which Sir Mervyn Ferrand had walked that dark night. But oh, how changed everything was! Yet not more changed than our own lives. It was a glorious afternoon in September. The rain of the preceding day had left the earth moist and fresh. The fields, on either side of the road, were gleaming with that bright pure emerald which they wear after the ruthless scythe has swept away the ripe grass and the marguerites and other flowers which grow among it; or else they were filled from hedge to hedge with a golden sea of waving corn, or sheaves waiting to be garnered; for the harvest that year was not early. The wild roses were long over, but fragrant honeysuckle and other wild flowers still made gay the hedgerows and banks. The birds had awakened from their August silence, and were singing once more. The great sleepy cows lay under the shade of the trees. The large mows of new hay stood side by side with their dingy-looking, but more valuable, elder brothers. The whole land seemed wrapped in happy autumnal repose. The scene was calm, peaceful, and thoroughly typical of England. So beautiful it was, so full I now felt of love for my native land, that had these pages been then written, I should upon my return home have erased all my glowing description of Seville.

A breath of soft but fresh air came blowing from the far-away downs. I drew in a deep draught; I threw back my shoulders and stood erect. I laughed aloud in my great happiness as a comical picture, familiar to my childhood, of Christian losing his burden, rose before my mind, and seemed to be the exact thing wanted to illustrate my own case. Yes, the burden I had borne had fallen from my back forever!

Ah! here is the spot—the very spot where Sir Mervyn fell. It was here, just under that cluster of ragged-robins, I must have placed his corpse, little thinking that the kind white snow would hide it, and save my love and me. Oh, how I prayed in those days that the bitter weather might last; that its iron grip would hold the world fast until Philippa's health and strength returned! It did so, and saved us!

"Where are the snows that fell last year?" Ah! should I not rather sing, "Where is the grief of yesterday?" Gone like the snow. Other snow may fall, other grief may come, but last year's snow and yesterday's grief are gone forever!

Nevertheless, that spot was too suggestive of horrible reminiscences for me to linger long over it. I turned away, and in my great happiness could whisper to myself that I forgave the dead man for the ill he had wrought. May his bones rest in peace! I walked along the road, right on until I came to the cottage in which, like a coward who could not face his troubles, I had spent those aimless, miserable months. It was untenanted. Half defaced auction bills were in the windows and on the doorposts; for some months ago the furniture had been sold. I paused and looked at the window by which Philippa had entered, and felt that since that night I had passed through more grief, passion, fear, hope, and joy than would fill an ordinary lifetime. Then I turned and shook the dust off my feet. Never again would I come within twenty miles of this place.

On the road back, to my annoyance, I encountered Mrs. Wilson. I tried to pass without sign of recognition, but she was too quick for me. She stood in front of me, and I was bound to stop.

She was more haggard, more drawn, more aquiline-looking than ever. Her eyes alone looked young. They at least had spirit and vitality in them. They positively blazed upon me.

"She did not do it, after all!" she said fiercely.

At first I thought of affecting surprise, and asking her what she meant; but I felt that any attempt at equivoque would be but vain.

"She did not," I answered shortly.

"Fool that I was!" she cried. "Fool, to be led away by an impulse! Why did I tell her? I swear to you, Dr. North, that had I not felt sure it was her act, she should never have known. She should have gone to her grave a shamed woman, as I shall go!"

Her look was venom itself.

"Remember," I said sternly, "Lady Ferrand is now my wife. I will not hear her name coupled with yours."

She laughed scornfully. "Your wife! She soon forgot her first love. Why did I speak? I wish my hand had withered before I wrote that letter. Do you know why I wrote it?"

"No; nor do I care."

"I wrote it for vengeance. She had, I thought, served that man as I ought to have served him; but I hated her for it, for I loved him still. So I thought it would be so sweet for her to know that she had killed her husband, and for you, her lover—I knew you were her lover—to know that I could at any moment give her up to justice! I was a fool. Why did that man plead guilty? When I saw your wife rise in court I laughed. I knew what was coming. Now, instead of harming her, I have done her good."

"You have," I said curtly, and turned upon my heel. The malignity of this woman was so intense that I felt thankful she could in no way work Philippa harm.

* * *

A quarter of a mile up the road I turned. Mrs. Wilson, a black spot on a fair scene, was standing gazing after me. I hurried on until a bend in the path hid her from sight. I hurried on back to Philippa and happiness!

CHAPTER XVII.

CLEAR SKIES.

ALTHOUGH England was now to me and to my wife a land very different from the one we quitted some eight months ago, we were anxious to get back to Seville, if only to set at rest my mother's fears. She, poor woman, as a letter showed, was much exercised as to what manner of business could have made us leave her in so unceremonious a way. The moment the glad truth had become known to me, I had telegraphed, saying that all was well with us, and that we should soon join her. Two things only detained us.

The first was that we wanted the convict's confession. Although Philippa said little on the subject, I knew that until it arrived she would not be quite happy. There was with her a haunting dread that the man, in the hopes of mitigating his sentence, had pleaded guilty to a crime of which he was innocent. Even the accurate account which I gave her of my interview with the solicitor did not quite satisfy her. So we waited impatiently for the full explanation, which might or might not come.

The second thing which kept us in London was this. I determined that before I left I would have the fact that when I married Philippa I married Lady Ferrand fully acknowledged. I found my way to the gentlemen who were winding up the dead man's affairs, and stated my case to their incredulous ears. At first they treated me as an impostor.

But not for long. Indeed, my task was half done. They had already, without any assistance from Mrs. Wilson, ferreted out the date and particulars of the death of the first Lady Ferrand. They had but to assure themselves that the marriage-certificate which I laid before them was no forgery, and surrender at discretion.

It was a poor estate, the administrators told me. Sir Mervyn had died intestate. He had during his lifetime made away with nearly all he could alienate. Still, there was some personal property, of which my wife could claim a share, and a certain amount of real property, on which she was entitled to dower. But it was a very poor estate.

I cut them very short. I told them that, let the deceased's wealth be great or little, not one penny-piece of it should soil my wife's fingers. If Sir Mervyn Ferrand's heir was in want of the money, it should, provided he was a different stamp of man from his immediate predecessor, be given to him a free gift. If not, some hospital should be benefited by it. All I wanted was, that it should be clearly understood that Sir Mervyn Ferrand left a widow.

The administrators, one of whom was, by the bye, the heir, evidently looked upon me as a most eccentric personage. Perhaps it was for this reason, or—as I do not wish to cast unmerited blame—perhaps it was because the estate wound up to nothing—well, any way, even to this day we have received no communication, much less remittance, from the administrators; nor, to tell the truth, have I troubled them again. Philippa's marriage admitted, I washed my hands of all the Ferrand brood.

The confession did not arrive; but I persuaded Philippa to leave England. Mr. Crisp could send whatever he had to send to Seville just as well as to London. So once more, and this time in all but perfect happiness, we took that long journey which was by now quite familiar to us.

The joy, the wild joy, with which Philippa threw herself into my mother's arms checked all the upbraidings and reproach which we apparently merited. Our return was like the return of a prodigal son and daughter. Laughter, tears, and happiness!

Although I told my mother nothing as to the object of our mysterious journey; although she asked me nothing; although no word evidencing her knowledge of what had passed has ever crossed her lips, I know that all has been revealed to her; that Philippa has sobbed out the whole strange tale on her breast. I know it by this, that since the day of our return my mother's deep love for my wife has shown itself even tenderer, sweeter, and deeper. Yes, I was spared the telling of the tale. My mother's eyes the next day showed me that Philippa had given her the history, as I have given it here, from beginning to end.

No, not quite the end. Sit by me once more, as I asked you at the beginning of my story to sit by me; but this time, not by the side of a smouldering fire, but out in the fair, gay *patio* of our Andalusian home. Philippa and I are side by side. The post has just come in, and brought me a bulky packet, on which, in a clerkly hand, is written my name and address. I tear the wrapper open with eagerness. I know what it contains; Philippa knows. I wish to read it first alone, but the appealing look in her eyes turns me from my purpose. After all, there is nothing to fear, there can be nothing which she should not know. So, with our cheeks all but touching, we read together. Sit by us, lean over my shoulder, and read with us.

"The confession of William Evans, now lying in Tewnham jail under sentence of death:

"On the fifth of January, this year, I returned from New Zealand. I worked my passage home. When I reached London I had but a few shillings in my pocket. I had no articles of value which I could sell. All I owned, except my clothes and the little bit of money, was a pistol which a man on board the ship had given me. It was a pistol of his own invention. He had several with him, and said he wanted to get the sort known. Why he gave it to me God knows; but he did, and a couple of cartridges.

"I spent my money—all but a shilling or two. I tried to get work, but none was to be had. Then I remembered that I once had a friend who lived near Roding. I went there by train. I had just enough money to pay my fare. I found that the man I knew had left the place two years ago. I walked back to the town penniless and desperate.

"The first thing I did was to go to the pawnbroker's, and try and sell the pistol. The man wouldn't buy it at any price. He said his shop was full of pistols. I went away, and walked to the railway station to try and earn a few pence somehow. I was in despair—all but starving.

"About seven o'clock the train from London came in. A tall gentleman came out of the door of the station. I asked him if he had any luggage I could carry for him. He told me to be off. Then I asked him, for pity's sake, to give me a shilling to buy some food. He cursed me, and I began to hate him.

"He stood under the gas-lamp and drew out a great gold watch and looked at the time. Then he asked a man near which road he must take to get to a village named Cherwell. The man told him. I saw him walk away, and I knew where he was going.

"I shall be hanged next week; there is no hope for me. But I tell the truth when I say that, bad fellow as I have been, I had never committed such a crime as the one which at that moment entered my head. That tall man had money, jewelry, and good clothing; I had nothing. I was starving. So I ran on, got before him, went miles up the road, and sat down in the bitter cold on a heap of stones, waiting for him to come, and making up my mind to kill and rob him. I knew I must kill him, because he was so much stronger and bigger than I was. My pistol was loaded.

"He came. I saw him in the moonlight. I stood up as he came near and, God forgive me, pulled the trigger, and shot him through the heart. He fell like a stone, and I knew I was a murderer.

"Oh, if I could I would have undone the deed! I stood for a long time before I dared to go to the body and steal the things for which I had committed the crime. Then I nerved myself and went to take the price for which, unless God is merciful, I had sold my soul.

"I never took a farthing. Just as I was about to begin I heard the sound of feet. I looked up, and saw a woman or a spirit coming to me. I dropped the pistol in terror. I felt sure she saw me. I looked at her under the moon. Her face was white, her lips were moving, her hair was all flying about. She came straight to where the dead man lay, then stopped and wrung her hands. I fled away in deadly fear. I ran across several fields. I dared not stop. I thought that spirit or ghost was following me.

"I ran on until the snow began. I must have died in that snow-storm if I had not found a half-roofed cowshed. I crept into this, and lay all the night and part of the next day. I was the most wretched being in the world.

"Hunger at last drove me out. I got through the snow somehow, and reached a house, where the people saved me from dying of starvation. But nothing could make me go again to the spot where I had done the murder. My life since then has been one of agony. Even now that I am going to be hanged I am happier than I have felt for months. May God forgive my crime!

"I pleaded guilty at the trial because I turned round in the dock, and saw the woman who I thought was a spirit standing up and ready to denounce me to the judge. I knew that she saw me that night, and I was bound to be found guilty.

"I have confessed all. Every word of this is truth. As I hope for mercy, it is all true!

"WILLIAM EVANS.

"P. S.—I took the above confession down from the prisoner's dictation. It should be all you want. The man seems thoroughly penitent, but I do not trouble you with his expressions of remorse and regret.

"I remain, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"STEPHEN CRISP."

We read the last lines; the paper fluttered down from our hands; we turned to each other. Tears of deep thankfulness were in my wife's sweet eyes. Down to the smallest detail, the wretched man's confession made everything clear. Nothing was left unexplained, except, perhaps, the motive which induced Philippa to go that night to meet her would-be betrayer once more. This we shall never know, but her temporary madness may amply account for it. We need seek no further; the faintest doubt as to her own perfect innocence is removed from my wife's mind. Hand in hand, heart to heart, lip to lip, we can stand, and feel that our troubles are at last over.

Our troubles over! Shall those words be the last I write? No, one scene more—the scene that lies before me even now.

An English home. Outside, green shaven lawns, trim paths, and fine old trees. Inside, the comfort and the peace which make an English home the sweetest in the world. For when the need was gone; when sunny Spain no longer was for us the one safe land, its charms diminished, and we pined to see once more England's fair fields and ruddy honest faces. So back we came, and made ourselves a home, far, far away from every spot the sight of which might wake sad thoughts. And here we live, and shall live till that hour when one of us must kiss the other's clay-cold brow, and know that death has parted those whom naught but death could part.

Look out; look through this shaded window. There she sits, my wife; a tall son at her side, fair daughters near her. Years, many years have passed, but left no lines upon her brow; brought no white threads to streak that raven hair. The rich bright beauty of the girl is still her own. To me, now as of yore, the sweetest, fairest woman in the world!

The children see me as I gaze with thoughtful happy eyes upon that group beneath the trees. They call beckon me. My wife looks up; her eyes meet mi just raised from these sad pages. Ah! love, sweet lo in those dear eyes what was it once my fate to rea Shame, sorrow, dread, despair, and love. All these, sa love, have vanished long ago; and as I turn to pen the lines—the last—that look of calm, assured, unclouded j keeps with me, telling me that from her life has passe even the very memory of those dark, dark days!

THE END.

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